Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Terminal evaluation of the project “Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protect Area System in Jiangxi Province”

Project Evaluation Series
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Project code: GCP/CPR/052/GFF
GEF ID: 4662

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Abstract

This is the terminal evaluation report of the project "Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province". The Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded the project in China, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) implemented it. The Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR) in Jiangxi Province acted as the executing partner. The primary audience and users of this evaluation are: FAO divisions, Regional Offices and Country Offices; other project stakeholders; Chinese government counterparts; and the GEF.

The terminal evaluation was based on several evaluation questions and used four main sources of data: (i) desk reviews of relevant documents and information; (ii) key informant interviews (KIIs) with project stakeholders; (iii) focus group discussions (FGDs); and (iv) field visits. Data were analysed to address the evaluation questions, and ratings were assigned according to the GEF evaluation requirements.

Overall, the project rating was highly satisfactory. Progress towards the objective was highly satisfactory, and effectiveness was highly satisfactory. Targets were achieved for all 25 indicators. The project had excellent results in wetland restoration, protected area management, cross-sector coordination, and co-management arrangements between communities and reserves. It also achieved income and other benefits from alternative livelihoods. The main shortcoming involved limited progress towards a long-term financing mechanism for wetland protection.

The project's relevance was highly satisfactory. Indeed, it aligned strongly with national priorities and met the priorities of both the PLNNR and the beneficiaries. Coherence was satisfactory, and project design and implementation were built on relevant projects and programmes in China.

Efficiency was highly satisfactory. In fact, this had improved significantly after a major delay before start-up due to a protracted negotiation period for the execution agreement. Sustainability of the project's results is likely. The PLNNR was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to project execution, and FAO effectively delivered its role as implementing agency.

The project design did not contain gender-disaggregated targets or gender-specific measures, but a focus on gender considerations was adopted during implementation.

This report provides five conclusions, three recommendations and one lesson learned. The recommendations involve the update and implementation of the exit strategy and sustainability plan. This should include a risk-based analysis of sustainability and consider long-term sustainability. Second, a final technical workshop should be held in Jiangxi Province. Finally, opportunities should be developed to share the project's knowledge and lessons learned with international audiences and internally within FAO.

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The evaluation benefited from the inputs of many other stakeholders, including project management staff and experts, protected area staff, government officers, villagers and local non-government organizations (NGOs), research scientists and national NGOs. Their contributions were critical to the Evaluation Team's work and are deeply appreciated.

Abbreviations

CPF	Country Programming Framework
EHI	Ecosystem Health Index
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FGD	focus group discussion
GEF	Global Environment Facility
JPWPAMS	Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Area Management Strategy
KAP	knowledge, attitudes and practices
KII	key informant interview
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MTR	mid-term review
NBCSAP	National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan
NFGA	National Forestry and Grassland Administration
NGO	non-governmental organization
OED	Office of Evaluation
OPIM	Operational Partners Implementation Modality
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PLNNR	Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve
PMO	Programme Management Office
PPR	project progress report
PWEPA	Poyang Lake Wetland Ecosystem Protected Area
TOC	theory of change

Executive summary

Introduction

1. This is terminal evaluation report of the project "Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province". This terminal evaluation is a requirement of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for project monitoring and reporting purposes.

2. The objective of the terminal evaluation revolves around a double function of accountability and learning. It assesses the project's results and their value, and documents important lessons for potential scaling, replication or follow-up projects.

3. The primary audience and users of the terminal evaluation are the Programme Management Office (PMO); FAO China and other FAO personnel; the GEF as the primary international donor; and Chinese counterpart institutions, such as the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department and the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA).

4. The terminal evaluation covers the project's implementation period from its entry on duty on 3 January 2017 to its expected end date of 6 January 2025. It analyses all project components.

5. The terminal evaluation was undertaken by a team of two: an international consultant and a national consultant. It was based on several evaluation questions that were provided in the evaluation's terms of reference. A mixed methods approach was used, involving multiple sources of data to inform the evaluation. The four main data collection methods are as follows: (i) desk reviews of all relevant documents and information; (ii) key informant interviews (KIIs) with project stakeholders; (iii) focus group discussions (FGDs) with some stakeholders to draw out experiences in a group setting; and (iv) field visits. The field visits, the FGDs and most of the KIIs were conducted between 23 and 31 October 2024 during a field mission to China and Jiangxi Province. Data analysis was conducted to address the evaluation questions, and ratings were assigned to some criteria according to the GEF evaluation requirements.

Main findings

6. The main findings are arranged based on the GEF evaluation criteria. For explanations and rationale for each finding, please see the body of this report.

Relevance

Finding 1. The project had high alignment with the country's environmental and developmental priorities. This alignment increased after the project was designed.

Finding 2. The project was congruent with the GEF-5 biodiversity programme strategies at the time of design and is now relevant to the objectives of the GEF-7 and the GEF-8 replenishments.

Finding 3. At the time of project design, the project's contribution to the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) for China was weak. Its contribution to the current CPF upon project completion is stronger.

Finding 4. The project's aims and activities were highly relevant to the priorities of the executing agency and to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. During implementation, the project adapted its alternative livelihood priorities to significantly increase the relevance of these interventions to beneficiaries.

Coherence

Finding 5. The intervention harmonized well with actions implemented by other actors. This is because the project was very thorough in identifying other relevant actions and initiatives, building lessons learned into its design, adding value and avoiding duplication. The project worked well with other actors and projects during implementation, even though interaction with the GEF's China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action: Main Streams of Life programme – also known as the 6+1 programme – was limited due to the project's late start.

Finding 6. The project had good internal coherence. The project activities were well designed to meet the objective and global environmental benefits. There were minor shortcomings relating to the position of some outputs and indicators in the logical flow.

Efficiency

Finding 7. There were significant delays at project start due to the time taken to negotiate the execution agreement between the executing agency, the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR), and FAO. After this, the collaboration between FAO and the operational partner was constructive and worked well towards the timely resolution of issues. The execution modality also worked well. The project's results were excellent, and provincial and agency-level capacity were significantly strengthened.

Finding 8. After the start-up delays, the project was implemented in a cost-effective way. The GEF funds were leveraged very effectively.

Implementation

Finding 9. FAO effectively delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal preparation, approval, oversight and supervision. There were significant delays in start-up.

Execution

Finding 10. The PLNNR was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project. This occurred after a slow start and major improvements following the mid-term review (MTR).

Finding 11. The project carefully considered the responses to the MTR recommendations, which led to improvements in implementation.

Effectiveness

Finding 12. The project made highly satisfactory progress towards its objective: catalyse the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity.

Finding 13. The project made satisfactory progress towards Component 1: improve and consolidate the wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province.

Finding 14. The project made highly satisfactory progress towards Component 2: strengthen wetland protected area management capacity.

Finding 15. The project made satisfactory progress towards Component 3: strengthen institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage the consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province.

Finding 16. The project significantly contributed to additional results in three areas that were not envisaged in the project document. This led to positive outcomes: improved socioeconomic outcomes from the alternative livelihood interventions; enhanced preparedness for climate change among wetland management authorities; and the establishment of an important biannual International Birdwatching Week.

Finding 17. As of 30 June 2024, USD 39 449 585 of total co-financing was realized. This is 148 percent of the total amount committed in the project document – an additional USD 12.8 million. This extra co-financing meant that more management and monitoring of the region's wetlands and reserves occurred. The central government invested significantly in strengthening the capacity of biodiversity conservation and migratory bird habitats, constructing smart monitoring systems and purchasing patrol equipment.

Sustainability

Finding 18. Important steps were taken during implementation to increase the likelihood that the results will be sustainable. Medium-term sustainability is considered highly likely. The main risk to sustainability is the limited progress made towards a sustainable, long-term financing mechanism and the funding gap to sustain and replicate the community co-management and alternative livelihood models. Therefore, overall sustainability is considered likely.

Finding 19. The degree of ownership of the project's achievements by the main actors is strong. Enthusiasm and pride in the local biodiversity is high. There is almost unanimous interest in the results continuing. However, the level of resources that are available to capitalize on the achievements is highly variable.

Finding 20. The project developed a well-structured and logical exit strategy and sustainability plan. This should be updated by adding a risk-based analysis of the likelihood of sustainability and giving more attention to long-term sustainability, especially financial sustainability.

Monitoring and evaluation

Finding 21. The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan at the time of project endorsement was generally practical and sufficient. However, the results framework did not contain gender-disaggregated targets.

Finding 22. The M&E system was implemented in accordance with the M&E plan. The Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System will be an important long-term contributor to M&E in the Poyang Lake wetland reserves.

Finding 23. Information from the M&E system was used to inform project implementation and foster learning.

Application of the GEF policies and guidelines

Finding 24. The project took appropriate steps to consider environmental and social concerns during design and implementation.

Finding 25. It appears that during project design, there was only limited involvement of local communities in identifying the interventions detailed in the project document. However, during implementation, the local communities were extensively informed, consulted and involved in the decision-making process on the activities that would be undertaken at different locations.

Finding 26. The project document contained no gender-specific activities, no gender-disaggregated targets and no requirement to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy. However, the project was proactive in mainstreaming gender equality during implementation. This included the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy and provisions for gender-disaggregated reporting.

Finding 27. Other human rights issues were mainstreamed into the project, especially through livelihood support for disadvantaged society members and former fishers affected by the Yangtze River fishing ban. Additionally, this mainstreaming proactively included youth in the activities.

Finding 28. The project built strong and sustainable partnerships and engaged effectively with stakeholders during implementation.

Finding 29. The project developed a communications and knowledge sharing strategy. It implemented many communications and knowledge sharing activities: developing the wetland protected area information management system; undertaking study tours and knowledge sharing events; and delivering numerous awareness raising products and events.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance and coherence. The project had high alignment with the country priorities and the GEF programme strategies. During the design, it made a weak contribution to the FAO CPF for China, but this contribution is now stronger. The project's aims and activities were highly relevant to the priorities of the executing agency and the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. This relevance increased significantly during implementation. The project's design and implementation were thorough in harmonizing actions by other actors, building lessons learned into the design of the project, adding value and avoiding duplication.

Conclusion 2. Efficiency. There were significant delays at start-up as the execution agreement was negotiated between the executing agency and FAO. Thereafter, the project was efficiently implemented and cost effective. The project was successful at leveraging the GEF allocation to access significant additional resources, including enhanced levels of co-financing. The execution modality worked well. The project's results were excellent, and provincial and agency-level capacity were significantly strengthened.

Conclusion 3. Effectiveness. The project made highly satisfactory progress towards its objective and achieved all 25 indicators in the results framework. For some indicators, the targets were significantly exceeded – especially in the area of wetlands and reserves in the Poyang Lake area under improved management and protection, and in the number of people receiving training and capacity building.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability. Important steps were taken during implementation to increase the likelihood that results will be sustainable. Medium-term sustainability is considered highly likely. The main risk to sustainability is the limited progress made towards a sustainable long-term financing mechanism and the funding gap to sustain and replicate the community co-management and alternative livelihood models. Therefore, overall sustainability is considered likely.

Conclusion 5. Gender equality and other equity and human rights issues. The project document contained no gender-specific activities, no gender-disaggregated targets and no requirement to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy. However, the project was proactive in mainstreaming gender equality during implementation. This included the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy and provisions for gender-disaggregated reporting. Also, other human rights issues were mainstreamed into the project, especially by providing livelihood support for disadvantaged society members and former fishers affected by a ban on fishing in the Yangtze River system.

Recommendations

7. Three recommendations are provided. First, the exit strategy and sustainability plan should be updated and implemented. This should include a risk-based analysis of sustainability from the self-assessment report that was provided by the PMO to the Evaluation Team. This should also consider long-term sustainability, especially about what can be done to strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of improved protection for the Jiangxi wetlands and migratory birds. Second, a final project technical workshop should be held in Jiangxi Province with many stakeholders to enhance the transfer of knowledge and lessons learned to key experts and organizations. Finally, the project's results will be of great interest to international audiences and within FAO. Therefore, opportunities should be developed to share the knowledge and lessons learned with these groups.

Executive summary table 1. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table

The GEF criteria/dimensions	Rating[1]	Summary comments
A. OUTCOMES (relevance, coherence, effectiveness and progress towards impact, efficiency)	**HS**	The outcomes exceeded the targets, and they were highly relevant and cost effective. Excellent use was made of the GEF funds to leverage other funding and partnerships. Work on building cross-sector collaboration was of high quality and vital for sustainability. The executing agency, the PLNNR, was exemplary. The implementing agency, FAO, was very good.
A1. Relevance	**HS**	The project remained highly relevant, even ten years after it was developed. It became even more relevant because the project adapted activities and approaches to meet changes in the policy and environmental context (e.g. the Yangtze River fishing ban and extreme drought conditions). It responded well to the needs of the beneficiaries (see Subsection 3.1).
A2. Coherence	**S**	The project harmonized well with the actions implemented by other actors, especially since its design was very thorough in identifying other relevant actions and initiatives and building in lessons learned. During implementation, the project worked well with other actors and projects, but interaction with the 6+1 programme was limited (see Subsection 3.2).
A3. Effectiveness	**HS**	The project met all targets and exceeded some. The connection between policy outcomes, ecological outcomes and social outcomes, especially alternative livelihoods, was a feature. Progress towards the objective of catalysing the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity was very good (see Subsection 3.4).
A4. Efficiency	**HS**	The project was a very cost-effective use of USD 5 million of the GEF funds. This was due to excellent leveraging of additional funding sources and constructive partnership development. The execution modality worked well. Provincial and agency-level capacity were strengthened (see Subsection 3.3).

The GEF criteria/dimensions	Rating[1]	Summary comments
B. SUSTAINABILITY (financial, sociopolitical, institutional and governance, environmental dimensions including risks to sustainability)	**L**	Although the likelihood of medium-term sustainability is considered highly likely, less substantial contributions were made to long-term sustainability. There was only limited progress towards a sustainable long-term financing mechanism. For this reason, the overall likelihood of sustainability is assessed as likely (see Section 4).
C. IMPLEMENTATION	**S**	As the GEF implementing agency, FAO met expectations and had no significant weaknesses. FAO supervised the project well and played an important, supportive role in the project's adaptive management responses (see Subsection 3.3.1).
D. EXECUTION	**HS**	Executing agency performance was exemplary, especially after the MTR. Despite delays from start-up and the COVID-19 pandemic, the results were timely and highly efficient. The executing agency provided a high-quality combination of project management capability and technical capacity. It had a good reputation among the Poyang Lake community and other agencies, which meant it was well positioned for this role in the project. Indeed, this role within the community was strengthened during the project. The relationship with the GEF agency, FAO, was strong and constructive (see Subsection 3.3.2).
M&E plan	**S**	The M&E plan in the project document was generally practical and sufficient. Clear M&E workplans and strategies were established and specified in various subcontracts (see Subsection 5.1.1).
M&E implementation	**S**	The M&E implementation followed the M&E plan well, and progress was reported clearly by the Programme Implementation Reports (PIRs), the project progress reports (PPRs) and other records (see Subsection 5.1.2).
Overall project rating	**HS**	

Note: [1] See the rating scheme in Appendix 3.

1. Introduction

1.1 General information and project and evaluation background

1. The GCP/CPR/052/GFF project "Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province" aimed to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant wetland biodiversity in Jiangxi Province, China. The project's objective was to catalyse the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system in order to conserve globally important biological diversity.

2. The project started on 3 January 2017 following the Chief Executive Officer endorsement on 5 September 2014. Originally scheduled to end on 2 April 2022, the project was extended until 6 January 2025. The total budget for the project was USD 31 981 000 with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) allocation of USD 5 108 800 and co-funding, totalling USD 26 692 000. The GEF agency was the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The executing agency was the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR) under the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department.

3. The protected area system in Jiangxi Province (see Figure 1) encompasses 190 nature reserves that span 994 700 ha (6 percent of the province's total area). This includes 15 national nature reserves that cover 244 900 ha, 39 provincial reserves that total 340 900 ha and 136 county-level reserves that span 408 900 ha.[1] Predominantly managed by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department, these reserves play a vital role in conserving biodiversity and providing ecosystem services that are crucial for local economies and community livelihoods.

Figure 1. Map of China indicating Jiangxi Province

Note: Refer to the disclaimer on page ii for the names and boundaries used in this map.

Source: Terminal evaluation terms of reference.

[1] These statistics on the reserve system in Jiangxi Province have been updated since the project document through data provided by the Programme Management Office (PMO).

4. Within this system, 23 wetland reserves of approximately 268 300 ha serve as essential habitats for globally significant species and contribute to various ecosystem services. Notably, they support freshwater supply, fisheries, agricultural production, flood mitigation, water purification, carbon sequestration and nature-based tourism. Additionally, they provide critical habitats for wintering waterbirds like the Siberian crane (*Grus leucogeranus*) and other endangered species like the Chinese water deer (*Hydropotes inermis*) and the finless porpoise (*Neophocaena phocaenoides)*.

5. Despite their significance, only three of these reserves – namely the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve – are operational, covering nearly half of the Poyang Lake basin. The remaining reserves are primarily inactive due to constraints in operational and institutional capacity. This contributes to the degradation and fragmentation of wetland habitats. Factors such as rapid socioeconomic development, pollution and climate variability further threaten the ecological integrity of these wetlands, posing long-term risks to socioeconomic growth.

6. The institutional, policy and legal framework for wetland management in China, particularly in Jiangxi Province, is multifaceted and complex. At the national level, several institutions, including the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the State Forestry Administration and the Ministry of Agriculture, play significant roles in wetland governance and conservation. The Ministry of Environmental Protection oversees biodiversity conservation and environmental protection at the national level, while the State Forestry Administration is primarily responsible for managing forests, wildlife and wetlands, including the approval and management of wetland protected areas. The Ministry of Agriculture focuses on aquatic biodiversity and the management of aquatic wildlife in protected areas.

7. The project document identified that, in Jiangxi Province, the Mountain-River-Lake Development Committee and the Poyang Lake Wintering Migratory Birds and Wetland Joint Protection Committee coordinate wetland protection efforts. The Jiangxi Province Forestry Department and individual wetland nature reserves are key players in wetland conservation and management within the province. The Jiangxi Province Forestry Department oversees wetlands and nature reserves, while the Jiangxi Wildlife Protection Administration is responsible for wildlife protection within reserves. Other provincial institutions such as the Environmental Protection Department and the Development and Reform Commission also contribute to wetland management.

8. Policy frameworks at both the national and provincial levels provide guidance for wetland conservation. The Poyang Lake Ecological Economic Zone plan, approved by the State Council, outlines strategies for wetland conservation in the region. Provincial policies such as the Jiangxi Environmental Protection Plan and the Jiangxi Forestry Plan further support wetland conservation efforts.

9. Legally, wetland management in China is governed by various laws and regulations, including the Nature Reserve Law, the Law on the Protection of Wildlife, and the Water Pollution Prevention Law. These laws provide the legal basis for wetland protection and management activities.

10. Overall, the institutional, policy and legal framework for wetland management in China, including Jiangxi Province, reflects a concerted effort to address the complex challenges of wetland conservation and sustainability. However, effective implementation and

coordination remain essential to ensure the long-term protection and management of wetland ecosystems.

11. In response, the project aimed to establish a provincial-level management framework for wetland protected areas in Jiangxi Province. Through comprehensive management plans and actions at six demonstration sites, including the aforementioned reserves and three county-level areas, the project sought to address operational challenges and promote ecosystem conservation. Furthermore, by aligning to the China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action – particularly initiatives focused on wetland restoration in neighbouring provinces – the project aimed to amplify its impact across the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin. This then aimed to foster coordinated efforts and generate economies of scale for enhanced conservation outcomes.

12. The project's objective focused on catalysing the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity. The project was structured around three distinct components, each aimed at achieving specific outcomes and outputs to enhance the effectiveness of wetland protected areas across Jiangxi Province. These components were designed to facilitate the scaling up and replication of frameworks, best practices and capacities throughout the entire wetland protected area system.

   i. **Component 1.** Improved and consolidated wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province: this synergized component depended on the outcomes and results of Component 2 and Component 3. Key outputs of this component included the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Area Management Strategy (JPWPAMS), an expansion of wetland protected areas that are effectively managed based on that strategy, and enhanced management capacities and partnerships.

   ii. **Component 2.** Wetland protected area management capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites: this piloted wetland management models and best practices, and strengthened capacities at three demonstration wetland reserve sites. The results aimed to guide the formulation of management strategies and guidelines for numerous other wetland protected areas in Jiangxi Province.

   iii. **Component 3.** Institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage a consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province: this focused on information, capacity building and awareness to support wetland conservation and sustainable development at the provincial level.

13. The project was part of the GEF's China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action: Main Streams of Life programme – also known as the 6+1 programme – a strategic framework that represents China's national priority for wetland protected area support. The 6+1 programme aimed to catalyse the sustainability of the national protected area system for the conservation of globally significant wetland biodiversity. The 6+1 programme focused on strengthening the wetland protected area subsystem and consisted of seven interlinked projects, including a national project executed by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA), to create a strong national system for managing wetland protected areas, transform management practices in seven different provinces, address the management needs of different wetland types and develop a database and networks to inform the management of these wetland types around the country.

Box 1. Background information on the project

The GEF project ID: 4662

FAO project ID: GCP/CPR/052/GFF No. 613305

The GEF-5 focal area(s): Biodiversity 1 improve sustainability of protected area systems

FAO strategic objectives (2019): Strategic Objective 2 make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more sustainable

Country Programming Framework (CPF) from 2016 to 2020: Priority Area 1 and Priority Area 4 on fostering sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural development and facilitating China's regional and international agriculture cooperation

Total budget: USD 31 981 000

Total co-funding allocation: USD 26 692 000 broken down: 1) USD 26 230 000 in-kind and cash from the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Administration, the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve and local governments; 2) USD 142 000 from the International Crane Foundation; and 3) USD 180 200 from FAO in cash after an officially agreed revision of the budget in 2016

The GEF allocation/disbursed until 27 March 2024: USD 5 289 000/USD 5 207 142 (98%)

Date of Chief Executive Officer endorsement: 5 September 2014

Entry of duty (start date): 3 January 2017 (receipt of first instalment on 7 April 2017)

Implementation end date: 2 January 2022 (actual date 6 January 2025)

Executing agency: PLNNR, under the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department (which forms part of the Provincial Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources)

Implementation modality: Indirect execution through an execution agreement, which establishes the Jiangxi Province Finance Department as the recipient and the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department as the executing agency. FAO is required by the executing agency to support the Programme Management Office within the PLNNR to implement the project under the authority of a project steering committee.

Country and geographic locations: China, national project operating in Jiangxi Province

Protected areas/pilot sites: the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve

Project's environmental objective (goal): Contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant wetland biodiversity in Jiangxi Province

Main beneficiaries: Staff of the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department; members of provincial-level bodies such as the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee, the People's Congress of Jiangxi, the Provincial Development and Reform Commission, and the Mountain-River-Lake Office; staff of the three targeted wetland nature reserves; staff of the municipal forestry bureaus and County People's Governments; local communities around the target nature reserves; and, indirectly, other provincial forestry and grassland departments managing wetland nature reserves

Key technical partners: International Crane Foundation and FAO

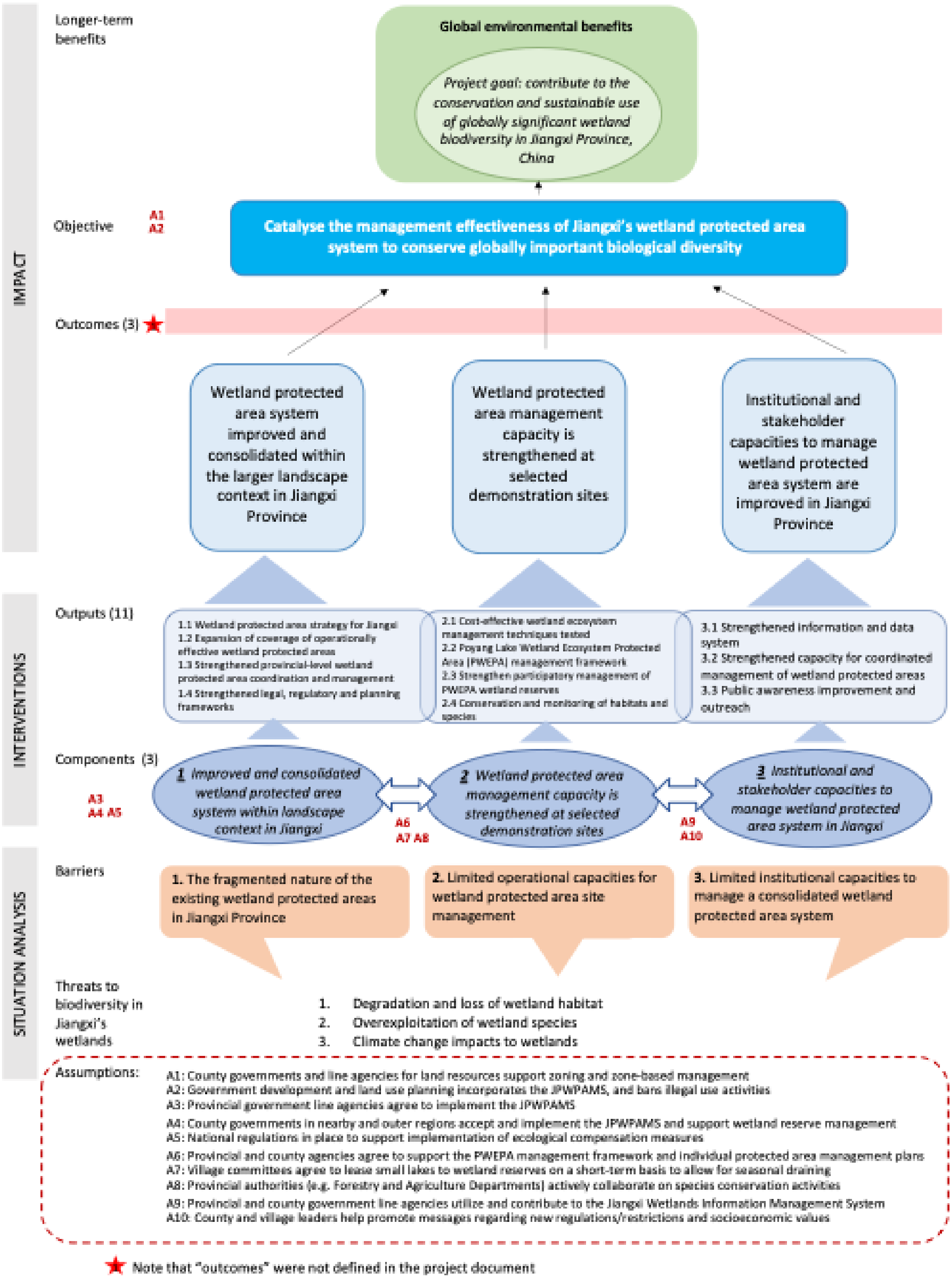
1.2 Theory of change

14. The project document did not contain a theory of change (TOC), so a TOC was developed for the project during the mid-term review (MTR). The process for developing this TOC is described in the MTR report (p. 43). The TOC from the MTR provided an informative analytical perspective of the project's intended impacts and how the interventions were expected to achieve those impacts. However, this TOC contained new and derived parameters that were not in the project's results framework. For this reason, it did not give a clear perspective of the project's design and agreed interventions to achieve its defined objective and goal. Furthermore, it did not provide a convenient tool for analysing the existing strategy and design of the project or assessing both the intended and unintended effects.

15. For this reason, the Evaluation Team prepared a new TOC for use during the terminal evaluation (see Figure 2). This revisited TOC was based largely on existing parameters in the project document. The revised TOC summarized the situation analysis that underpinned the project's preparation and showed how the three components responded to three main identified barriers. There were 11 project outputs in these components. These led to the project's objective and goal, which delivered global environmental benefits. The project design did not include any outcomes, but it included some outcome indicators and impact indicators. To address this gap, the Evaluation Team included three outcomes in the TOC, which reflected the anticipated change of state upon delivering the three components. This completed the cause-and-effect relationship between the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. The revised TOC also included ten assumptions from the original results framework and showed where, in the logical chain, the assumptions applied.

16. This TOC was validated during the terminal evaluation's inception phase with the Programme Management Office (PMO), which provided input on the content – especially recommended changes to the underlying assumptions. This revised TOC was used during the terminal evaluation to analyse the strategy and design of the project and assess both the intended and unintended effects.

Figure 2. Revised theory of change



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

2. Methodology

2.1 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

17. This terminal evaluation has the dual and mutually reinforcing objective of accountability and learning. In terms of accountability, this evaluation is being conducted in order to assess the degree to which the project contributed to the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant wetland biodiversity in Jiangxi Province. It will assess the results of the project, their value in relation to the target beneficiaries, and the information needs and interests of policymakers. The latter includes the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and other actors with decision-making power, for example, FAO management and the GEF Coordination Unit. It also aims to draw lessons from project implementation and facilitate the design and implementation of similar projects in the future in order to fulfil the learning objective.

18. The scope of this evaluation covers all project activities implemented from the entry on duty of 3 January 2017 to the expected end or not-to-exceed date of 6 January 2025. The geographical scope of the evaluation covers the Poyang Lake basin in Jiangxi Province, with a particular emphasis on three main intervention areas: the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve.

19. This evaluation examines the design, implementation and achievements of the project based on its results framework, monitoring data collected on its outputs and results, and the context.

20. The audience and intended users of this evaluation include the PMO within the PLNNR, FAO as it provided project implementation support and the GEF as the primary international donor. Chinese counterpart institutions directly involved in the project, such as the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department and the NFGA, which operates under the Ministry of Natural Resources, are also key stakeholders.

21. Additionally, the evaluation's findings are relevant to staff members of the reserves, namely the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve, and to officials from the municipal and county forestry bureaus and local governments associated with the county nature reserves that participated in the project. Civil society organizations, particularly local residents living in and around the project sites who are engaged in training and on-the-ground activities at the forest farms, constitute another important part of the audience.

22. Other potential interested parties include the People's Congress of Jiangxi, the Provincial Development and Reform Commission, and the Mountain-River-Lake Office.

23. The terms of reference for this terminal evaluation included several evaluation questions that guided the evaluation (see Table 1). The questions were based on evaluation criteria from the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, as well as the GEF-specific evaluation criteria, which were adapted to the context.

Table 1. Evaluation questions by the GEF criteria

Criteria	Dimensions	Evaluation questions[i]
Outcome (to be rated)	*Relevance (to be rated)*	1.1 To what extent are the three project components and objectives aligned with current country environmental and development priorities, the GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework, the mandates of executing partners, and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?
	Coherence (to be rated)	2.1 External coherence. Is the intervention harmonized with the actions implemented by other actors in the same context (e.g. development agencies, other GEF projects)? Does the intervention add value compared to others and was the duplication of effort avoided? 2.2 Internal coherence. To what extent did the project design provide a practical approach for addressing the targeted environmental concern (i.e. conservation of wetland biodiversity) in terms of coherence of the vertical and horizontal logic in the results framework? To what extent do the project components, activities and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system align with the project objectives?
	Efficiency (to be rated) - *Materialization of co-financing (NOT to be rated)* - *Implementation (to be rated)* - *Execution (to be rated)*	3.1 To what extent has the collaboration between FAO and the operational partner facilitated or hampered project execution and the timely resolution of issues during project implementation, and contributed to the project's results and objectives? 3.2 How is FAO monitoring progress and the technical quality of the work of the operational partner? Is the Budget Holder/project team appropriately equipped to monitor and oversee the operational partner? Does it get support if needed? Does it lead to the implementation of corrective actions and the improvement of identified weaknesses? 3.3 To what extent have the executing agencies, including the selected operational partner, effectively fulfilled their roles and responsibilities in the management and administration of the project?
	Effectiveness - *Additionality (NOT to be rated)* - *Contribution of co-financing to results achievement (NOT to be rated)* - *Progress towards impact (IF feasible and NOT to be rated)*	4.1 To what extent did the project contribute to: • improving and consolidating the wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province? • strengthening wetland protected area management capacity? • strengthening institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage the consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province? 4.2 What are the specific areas where the GEF support has contributed to additional or unintended results, and were these additional or unintended results positive or negative? 4.3 To what extent did the planned co-financing materialize, and how did the shortfall in co-financing,

Criteria	Dimensions	Evaluation questions[i]
		or the realization of greater than expected co-financing, affect project results?
Sustainability (to be rated)		5.1 What is the degree of ownership of the project's achievements by the main actors at the institutional, regional and local level, and to what extent do they have the resources and interests to capitalize on the achievements beyond the duration of the project? 5.2 To what extent has the project identified, anticipated and planned for key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project benefits (financial, institutional, environmental, sociopolitical and others)?
M&E design (to be rated)		6.1 To what extent did the M&E plan sufficiently identify resources and budget for the M&E activities to align with the project's theory of change and M&E requirements?
M&E implementation (to be rated)		7.1 Was information gathered systematically, in a timely manner and according to a robust methodology? 7.2 To what extent was the collected information used to inform decision-making, foster learning and support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?
	Gender	8.3 Were gender equality and empowerment and other equity and human rights issues mainstreamed into the project/programme, both in design and implementation?[ii2]

Notes: [i] The numbering of the evaluation questions was changed from the terms of reference to match the order of the criteria and dimensions in this template.

[ii] It should be noted that, as a GEF-5 project, there were few formal requirements during project design on the inclusion of components relating to gender equality and empowerment, environmental and social safeguards, and human rights issues.

2.2 Methodological design

24. This terminal evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards for evaluation (UNEG, 2016), the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) Project Evaluation Manual (FAO, 2019) and associated annexes, methodological guidelines and practices, and the GEF Guidelines for conducting the terminal evaluation of full-sized projects (GEF, 2023).

25. The evaluation was managed by FAO OED and undertaken by an Evaluation Team of two independent consultants: an international consultant and team leader, Adrian Stokes; and a national consultant, Liu Shuo.

26. During the design and preparation phase of the evaluation, an inception report was prepared according to the guidance in Annex 10 of the FAO OED Project Evaluation Manual. This included:

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i. a stakeholder analysis to inform decisions on who would be involved and the methodology that would be used to engage with them;

ii. an evaluation methodology with detailed information on the approaches to be used and the methods selected for data collection; and

iii. an evaluation matrix, which outlined how the methodology would be operationalized by the Evaluation Team. This detailed the specific evaluation questions and indicators under each evaluation question (see Table 1) and identified the sources for data collection (see Appendix 6).

27. The methodology involved multiple sources of data to inform the evaluation and ensure the collection of evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. A qualitative approach was used given the type of project activities and evaluation questions. This involved adopting a combination of methods and instruments.

28. The four main data collection methods are outlined in the following points.

i. Desk reviews were undertaken of all relevant documents and information covering project design, implementation progress, and monitoring and review. This included quantitative components (assessing project progress reporting and analysing and summarizing other data sources, such as consultant and subcontractor reports) and qualitative components (note taking to summarize and analyse). A key part of the desk review involved analysing the project’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E), from design to implementation and project closure.

ii. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with project stakeholders were held. These were conducted as semi-structured interviews in a conversational format based on interview tools that were developed. In total, KIIs were held with 31 people. Interviewees were selected through a stakeholder analysis that was undertaken as part of the inception report preparation. Key informants were from the following categories:

- active stakeholders with the authority to make decisions related to the project;
- active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project;
- secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected);
- stakeholders at the grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention; and
- other interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area and civil society organizations.

iii. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held for some stakeholders to draw out experiences in a group setting based on a tool that was developed. These were appropriate for beneficiaries at project sites, especially at villages and farms, and were planned carefully to be sensitive to specific settings and circumstances. In total, three groups of local community residents participated in the FGDs.

iv. Field visits were undertaken to obtain a first-hand understanding of project activities and achievements and to connect with beneficiaries. The KIIs and FGDs with beneficiaries and other stakeholders were conducted during the field visits (see Table 2).

29. Most interviews and site visits were held during a field mission by the Evaluation Team to Beijing and Jiangxi Province from 23 to 31 October 2024. Some interviews were conducted remotely after that period.

30. In accordance with the terms of reference, the selection of sites for field visits was made by the Evaluation Team. This was based on consultations with the PMO and the Evaluation Manager, and according to various criteria, especially the following.

    i. Budget implementation level: this involved sites with a medium or high level of budget implementation and support.

    ii. Indicative number of activities implemented: this involved sites with a relatively medium or high number of representative activities under project outputs.

    iii. Outcome level: this involved sites with positive and less positive outcomes to identify lessons that are useful for future interventions.

31. Due to time limitations, not all of the main demonstration protected areas (PLNNR, Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve) and targeted county-level nature reserves (Yugan, Wannian and Lushan) could be visited during the mission. The focus was therefore on selecting at least two from each of these categories and sampling a representative of each intervention type. Table 2 summarizes the non-random selection according to the budget implementation level and the indicative number of activities implemented. It also lists other considerations. Although the outcome level was discussed with the PMO during the mission, this did not influence the final selection of sites.

Table 2. Selection of project sites to be visited based on criteria and other considerations

Site	Visit?	Criterion		Other considerations
		i. Budget implementation level	ii. Indicative number of activities implemented	
PLNNR	Yes	High	High	The PLNNR was the executing agency, a co-financer and a major focus for the project. During interviews, the key local government agencies/bureaus, including forestry, water and agriculture, jointly discussed progress and other key issues in the PLNNR under Component 2 and Component 3 of the project. This was an important source of evidence for the evaluation.
Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve	Yes	Medium	Medium	The Duchang County Forestry Bureau was a project co-financer. The Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve is one of the three main demonstration nature reserves where alternative livelihood and co-management arrangements between the local

Site	Visit?	Criterion		Other considerations
		i. Budget implementation level	ii. Indicative number of activities implemented	
				government and villagers were key activities under Component 2 of the project.
Wannian Nature Reserve	Yes	Low	Medium	The Wannian Nature Reserve had important research on the development of wetland sustainable financing under Component 2 of the project.
Yugan Nature Reserve	Yes	Low	Medium	The Yugan Nature Reserve had wild animal protection activities through an innovative cooperative network across multiple bureaus under Component 2 and Component 3 of the project.
Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve	No*	Medium	Medium	The third of the three main demonstration nature reserves involved interventions at the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve. These were similar to other sites that the Evaluation Team will visit. * The representative of this nature reserve was interviewed in Nanchang on 25 October 2024.
Lushan Nature Reserve	No*	Low	Low	The third of the county-level reserves involved interventions at the Lushan Nature Reserve. These were similar to other sites that the Evaluation Team will visit. * The representative of this nature reserve was interviewed in Nanchang on 25 October 2024.

Source: Author’s’ own elaboration

32. Data analysis was conducted after completion of the interviews and mission in order to address the evaluation questions, as detailed in the evaluation matrix (see Appendix 6). Where possible, evidence was triangulated by assessing the relevant evidence collected by at least two methods in order to verify findings and build a richer narrative of the results. Ratings were applied to some of the GEF criteria in accordance with Table 1.

2.3 Limitations

33. The sampling strategy had some limitations because two project sites were not visited. Nevertheless, the breadth of intervention types implemented by the project was covered by the selected sites. Interviews were held with relevant personnel from the nature reserves that were not visited. Generally, the mission itinerary allowed sufficient time for considered site visits and insightful interviews. The exception was in Nanchang on 25 October 2024, when a very busy schedule was planned and several meetings were brief and rushed.

34. The inception report identified various potential risks and limitations that the Evaluation Team might have faced. These are presented in the following points, together with observations from the Evaluation Team after data collection.

i. *Data gaps and quality issues, including the lack of baseline data, inconsistent reporting on gender and limited documentation of lessons learned, could hinder the assessment of progress and results.* There were no significant data gaps (including baselines) or inconsistencies in reporting to hinder the evaluation.

ii. *Limited accessibility of stakeholders or other movement restrictions, staff turnover, and potential challenges may occur in engaging private sector partners and NGOs and civil society organizations.* There were no difficulties in accessing identified stakeholders. There were some limitations in finding stakeholders who had been involved in the project since its design due to the long elapsed period and staff turnover.

iii. *The complexity of institutional arrangements and ongoing reforms may make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of cross-sectoral coordination and the mainstreaming of wetland conservation into sector plans.* The project had significant success in addressing institutional arrangements and cross-sectoral coordination, so there were no limitations from this issue.

iv. *There may be challenges in attributing higher-level results to project interventions, particularly in the context of other initiatives, external factors and the broader 6+1 programme.* An early interview was held with relevant personnel from the NFGA who were responsible for the national project under the 6+1 programme. This provided clarity around the attribution of results to different interventions and alleviated this issue.

v. *Issues may arise around the availability of information and documents that are considered by authorities to be sensitive.* The Evaluation Team had no difficulties in accessing relevant documentation.

35. There were no impacts on the mission itinerary from the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, there were no limitations or constraints on the availability of data from the period of restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

36. There were no limitations for site access in terms of security issues and weather impacts.

3. Outcomes

Overall outcome rating: Highly Satisfactory

Main finding 1. The overall project outcome is considered highly satisfactory. This is because relevance, effectiveness and efficiency were all rated as highly satisfactory, and coherence was rated as satisfactory.

3.1 Relevance

Rating: HIGHLY SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 1.1. To what extent are the three project components and objectives aligned with current country environmental and development priorities, the GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF), the mandates of executing partners, and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?

Finding 1. The project had high alignment with the country's environmental and developmental priorities. This alignment increased after the project was designed.

37. When designed, the project had strong alignment with China's 2011–2030 National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (NBCSAP) (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2010). The project document identified that out of 39 priority biodiversity conservation programmes in the 2011–2030 NBCSAP, 9 focused on wetland protected area management. Also, the Poyang Lake area, and Jiangxi Province overall, are listed as priority areas of inland terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity conservation.

38. In 2024, China released the latest 2023–2030 NBCSAP, which envisions "building a beautiful China where humans live in harmony with nature" (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2024). The diverse range of project activities were consistent with many aspects of the 2023–2030 NBCSAP, especially the priority areas of biodiversity mainstreaming, biodiversity loss, sustainable use and benefit sharing.

39. The project was also consistent with the following current strategies and plans.

    i. Since 2016, the Chinese Government has established the mission to establish an ecological civilization (Government of the People's Republic of China, 2016). This is a key element to the process of modernizing China by realizing a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Governments at all levels are addressing biodiversity conservation and environmental protection under this national policy. The project made an important contribution to construct a demonstration area in Jiangxi Province that reflected an ecological civilization.

    ii. The 2002–2030 National Wetland Conservation Programme (Government of the People's Republic of China, 2021) aims to establish wetland reserves and conservation sites, including sites identified in this project.

    iii. When developed, the project was consistent with various features of the 2011–2015 12th National Five-year Plan (Government of the People's Republic of China, 2011), including "Enhance Water Resources Conservation" under Chapter 22, which included a focus on the enhancement of wetland service in flood mitigation and the ecological rehabilitation of key rivers and lakes. The 13th (2016–2020) and 14th (2021–2024) National Five-year Plans (Government of the People's Republic of

China, 2016; 2020) included increasing levels of environmental protection. The project remained consistent with these. Also, the 13th National Five-year Plan (Government of the People's Republic of China, 2016) included "Poyang Lake water conservancy project" under Water Security Projects.

Finding 2. The project was congruent with the GEF-5 biodiversity programme strategies at the time of design and is now relevant to the objectives of the GEF-7 and the GEF-8 replenishments.

40. The project design directly aligned with the GEF-5 biodiversity 1: improve the sustainability of protected area systems. In particular, this related to Outcome 1.1: improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas. It aligned through measures aimed at strengthening the management effectiveness of wetland protected areas, improving and consolidating Jiangxi's wetland protected area system, and improving wetland protected area management capacity. It also contributed to biodiversity 2: mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes, seascapes and sectors. This occurred through the project's work on policy development, cross-sector collaboration and alternative livelihoods for communities.

41. The project's strategy, which was established during project design, remains relevant to later GEF replenishments. For example, it is consistent with the GEF-7 Objective 1 to mainstream biodiversity across sectors and within production landscapes and seascapes, and Objective 2 to strengthen biodiversity policy and institutional frameworks. It is also consistent with the GEF-8 Objective 1 to improve conservation, sustainable use and the restoration of natural ecosystems.

Finding 3. At the time of project design, the project's contribution to the FAO CPF for China was weak. Its contribution to the current CPF upon project completion is stronger.

42. The project document noted that the project contributed to Priority 4 of the FAO CPF in China, especially on fostering sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture development. However, the project document did not provide details on this contribution, and the CPF at the time of project development did not have a significant focus on wetlands or protected areas. Therefore, the explicit contributions to this were weak.

43. Upon project completion, the project made a stronger contribution to the current 2021–2025 CPF, especially the two overarching objectives of agrifood systems resilience and transformation. It also made a stronger contribution to the umbrella programmes of climate change and biodiversity conservation, natural resources management, and livelihoods. It also contributed to the 2016–2020 CPF Output 1.2 of biodiversity conservation and development interventions supported to revitalize key forest, water and wetland agroecosystems in the country.

Finding 4. The project's aims and activities were highly relevant to the priorities of the executing agency and to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. During implementation, the project adapted its alternative livelihood priorities to significantly increase the relevance of these interventions to beneficiaries.

44. The project's focus on improving the management of wetland protected areas in the Poyang Lake region was highly relevant to the mandate of the executing partner, the PLNNR. The project assisted them in delivering core functions of protected area management and monitoring, while also improving and building their capacity in community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and wetland restoration and

rehabilitation. During interviews with the executing agency, the project's strong alignment with the agency's priorities and building an ecological civilization was mentioned frequently.

45. The project was also highly relevant to the needs and priorities of community beneficiaries. The original design had a strong focus on providing alternative livelihood opportunities for local communities, which was underpinned by a model of co-management arrangements with local authorities. This was significantly strengthened during implementation when a 10-year fishing ban was imposed in the Yangtze River system. In fact, this became a permanent ban at some Poyang Lake reserves and had profound implications among those who rely on fishing for a livelihood. The project adapted by switching the focus of the alternative livelihood activities to target community members most affected by this policy change. As a consequence, many former fishers were beneficiaries of the project and had the opportunity to receive additional income and employment opportunities thanks to the project's interventions.

3.2 Coherence

Rating: SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 2.1. External coherence. Is the intervention harmonized with the actions implemented by other actors in the same context (for example, development agencies, other GEF projects)? Does the intervention add value compared to others and was the duplication of effort avoided?

Finding 5. The intervention harmonized well with actions implemented by other actors. This is because the project was very thorough in identifying other relevant actions and initiatives, building lessons learned into its design, adding value and avoiding duplication. The project worked well with other actors and projects during implementation, even though interaction with the GEF's China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action: Main Streams of Life programme – also known as the 6+1 programme – was limited due to the project's late start.

46. The project document detailed the intended coordination of the project with many related activities, including co-financing projects and other GEF projects in China. The project document effectively built lessons learned into the project design to ensure that the project added value and avoided duplication. By building on the knowledge and actions of other interventions, especially the conservation of globally significant migratory bird species, the project was well targeted to generate global environmental benefits.

47. The project document identified significant projects funded by co-financing partners.

i. The Office of the State Council Three Gorges Project involves hydrological and water quality studies. It establishes ecological monitoring databases, conducts research on ecosystem functions and biodiversity protection measures, and strengthens the capacity of the PLNNR and the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve in carrying out bird and habitat protection, wetland protection and restoration, and rare species rescue and breeding.

ii. The National Development and Reform Committee involves the construction of protected area infrastructure and facilities. Its activities relate to waterbird and habitat conservation, wetland restoration and public education.

iii. The Jiangxi Province Forestry Department will fund the operating expenses of the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve, and the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department Wetland Protection and Management Office. This involves the construction of six to seven new field stations for the PLNNR and an annual conservation awards programme for wintering migratory birds and wetland protection.

iv. The International Crane Foundation involves a baseline survey of biodiversity and ecological health of the Poyang Lake Wetlands Ecosystem. It monitors the number, distribution and dynamic situation of the Poyang Lake wintering migratory bird populations. It also developed an online version of existing databases on ecological factors in the Poyang Lake region. The GEF project will incorporate the International Crane Foundation’s scientific research and findings into its wetland protected area training programme as part of its emphasis on building the capacity of wetland protected areas to practice science-based adaptive management.

v. FAO deals with technical inputs and guidance in areas such as fisheries management and water management. The Organization supports project monitoring and project management.

48. The project document also identified several other relevant GEF projects in China.

i. The 6+1 programme (see Subsection 1.1): the project was a subproject of the 6+1 programme, which intended to contribute to and benefit from the programme’s work in order to strengthen the national wetlands protected area subsystem. It was one of three projects located at sites along the middle Yangtze River, alongside projects in the Anhui and Hubei Provinces. The project document described how the projects would work together, especially these three Yangtze River projects that shared similar conservation challenges and opportunities, proposed similar approaches to wetland conservation, and were scheduled to be implemented at roughly the same time.

ii. The United Nations Environment Programme and the GEF Siberian Crane Wetland Project: this six-year project ran from 2003 to 2009 to protect a network of globally important wetlands in Asia. The globally threatened Siberian crane was used as a flagship species. This linked activities at 16 key wetlands, including Poyang Lake, in several countries. The Siberian Crane Wetland Project focused on activities at the regional, national and site levels. It implemented many activities at Poyang Lake that were relevant to this Jiangxi wetlands project, including the establishment of reserves, ecological monitoring activities, database design and management, a Geographic Information System for the Poyang Lake basin, community outreach activities, and various research and investigations to inform conservation programmes. Lessons from this project were incorporated into the design of the current project.

iii. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the GEF China Nature Reserves Management Project: this site-based project focused on five protected areas across China, including the PLNNR. This project made very important contributions to improving infrastructure and equipment in the nature reserve and enhancing expertise and capacity in the PLNNR agency. This early GEF investment was considered one of the reasons why the PLNNR was chosen as the executing agency for this project. Various other lessons were learned from this project, especially on capacity building, the monitoring of species and habitats, and community co-management as a way to resolve conflicts between nature reserves and neighbouring communities.

49. The project described several other projects that were of relevance, including those implemented by the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Nanjing Institute of Geography and Limnology Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the German Agency for International Cooperation.

50. During implementation, the project worked effectively with different projects and actors. However, because of the delay before project start (see Finding 7), there was limited direct interaction with other projects in the 6+1 programme. A wrap-up meeting for the programme and the terminal evaluation for the national project were both held in 2019, shortly after this project commenced. The wrap-up meeting was used as an opportunity for the other six projects to share their experiences with this project.

Evaluation question 2.2. Internal coherence. To what extent did the project design provide a practical approach for addressing the targeted environmental concern (that is, conservation of wetland biodiversity) in terms of coherence of the vertical and horizontal logic in the results framework? To what extent do the project components, activities and M&E system align with the project objectives?

Finding 6. The project had good internal coherence. The project activities were well designed to meet the objective and global environmental benefits. There were minor shortcomings relating to the position of some outputs and indicators in the logical flow.

51. The project had generally good internal coherence. The global environmental benefits were tangible and achievable, the objective was relevant, the activities were appropriate to achieve those objectives, and a suitable M&E system was put in place. The situation analysis effectively identified the barriers to achieving the project's objective, and the project's components were well targeted to address those barriers (see Subsection 1.2). The design had a practical approach to achieve the targeted objective in that it built on good practices and lessons from other projects (see Finding 5).

52. There were specific shortcomings around the intervention logic for some outputs and indicators in the results framework. There was some mixing of the types of interventions under each component. For example, actions and indicators around protected area management plan development and implementation were included under both Component 1 and Component 2. Measuring improvements in management effectiveness was included in both Component 1 and Component 2. Component 3 involved institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage a consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province. However, the tracking of management effectiveness and capacity for protected area management was placed under Component 1 and Component 2. These specific shortcomings did not result in significant shortcomings in the overall strategy.

53. The MTR identified other areas that were considered shortcomings in the project design, in addition to shortcomings with the intervention. First, there was uncertainty at the time of the MTR around the role and method of engagement with the Provincial Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee. This was addressed effectively by the PMO and the PLNNR (see Finding 18). Second, it was identified that the project document did not provide details on the financial mechanism to support rural communities in transitioning to more sustainable livelihoods. Again, this was addressed by the PMO, and this aspect of the project was successful.

3.3 Efficiency

Rating: HIGHLY SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 3.1. To what extent has the collaboration between FAO and the operational partner facilitated or hampered project execution and the timely resolution of issues during project implementation, and contributed to the project's results and objectives?

Finding 7. There were significant delays at project start due to the time taken to negotiate the execution agreement between the executing agency, the PLNNR, and FAO. After this, the collaboration between FAO and the operational partner was constructive and worked well towards the timely resolution of issues. The execution modality also worked well. The project's results were excellent, and provincial and agency-level capacity were significantly strengthened.

54. There were delays at project start-up. The Chief Executive Officer endorsed the project on 5 September 2014, but implementation did not start until 3 January 2017. The Evaluation Team understands that the primary reason for this delay was the time required to negotiate the execution agreement for the project, which was signed by FAO on 15 November 2016, by the PLNNR on 23 December 2016 and by the Jiangxi Province Finance Department on 3 January 2017. There were two interrelated reasons for the extended negotiation period.

    i. The project was implemented under an indirect execution modality that involved FAO delegating the execution of project results to the operational partner, the PLNNR. The execution agreement was negotiated before FAO's Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) became operational with the issuance of Manual Section 701 (MS701/OPIM) in late 2015. This means that the project was not implemented under the OPIM (the modality is a "pre-OPIM modality") and that, in 2015 and 2016, FAO did not have a clear template and had limited relevant experience in negotiating such an execution agreement. Subsection 4.3.2 and Subsection 4.5.3 of the MTR report provided a detailed analysis of the circumstances around this and the prolonged delay.

    ii. This was the first time that the PLNNR executed an international project of such size. This was also its first GEF project. As a consequence, the negotiations between it, the Jiangxi Province Finance Department and FAO were protracted.

55. One of the implications of the delay was that other 6+1 programme projects implemented by different GEF agencies had progressed well before this project started (see Finding 5).

56. The project also experienced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions from 2020 to 2022. During interviews and as noted in the MTR report, it was apparent that the delays led primarily to slow financial expenditure. In contrast, the progress of project results showed fewer delays. Major floods also contributed to the slow delivery of results during 2020. At the time of the MTR, that is, late 2020, the delays due to project hold-ups, the COVID-19 pandemic and floods were estimated to have set the project back around 18 months. On this basis, a recommendation was made for an 18-month extension. Continual challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant that, in total, the project received a three-year extension and the expected completion date became 6 January 2025.

57. The MTR report (Subsection 4.5.3) described challenges in the relationship between FAO and the PLNNR from 2015 to 2017. These mainly related to the negotiation of funding arrangements, shortcomings in supervision and training of the PMO by FAO, and difficulties in reaching the point where the PMO had a full project team. There were no such challenges

at the time of this terminal evaluation. In fact, the Evaluation Team found the relationship to be constructive and mutually respectful, with a timely resolution of issues. These improvements were partly due to gradual changes as FAO and the PLNNR both settled in and became comfortable with the new modality and their respective roles. This was also partly due to specific responses to the MTR recommendations, such as affirming confidence in the PLNNR as the operational partner and making recommended changes to the project steering committee (see Finding 11 and Appendix 8).

58. Under the project's modality, the capacity of the PLNNR and other provincial, county and city agencies was enhanced. This was evident through measured increases in management effectiveness at 12 protected areas (see Indicator 1.4 and Indicator 2.1 in Appendix 5) and capacity for protected area management at all protected areas in the Poyang Lake Wetland Ecosystem Protected Area (PWEPA) (see Indicator 2.4 in Appendix 5). Also, the Evaluation Team heard during interviews with several government stakeholders that communication and collaboration between government agencies involved in managing Poyang Lake wetlands had significantly improved due to the PLNNR's efforts as an executing agency. For these reasons, and given the excellent results achieved, the modality is considered to have worked well.

Finding 8. After the start-up delays, the project was implemented in a cost-effective way. The GEF funds were leveraged very effectively.

59. The project successfully leveraged the GEF funding to bolster activities and achieve higher co-financing than originally committed. During interviews, the Evaluation Team heard numerous reports about stakeholders leveraging additional funds due to the GEF contribution. For example, the GEF project supported the Duchang Migratory Bird Rescue Centre by providing a stainless steel operating table to replace an old wooden table. This improved facility enabled the centre to leverage other sponsors and in-kind funding, including from Conservation International and district funding sources. Also, the project adapted its training and capacity building in response to investment by other sources. For example, at the Kangshan Lake Protection Station, the project provided training in the use of drones for monitoring since a drone had been acquired through a different source. Regarding co-financing, the project reported that USD 39.4 million in co-financing was realized. This was approximately USD 13 million more than the amount that had been committed in the project document (see Subsection 3.4.2).

60. The project had a very cost-effective use of the GEF contribution of approximately USD 5.3 million. Indeed, there was successful leveraging, and a wide diversity of results were delivered.

61. The PLNNR's expenditure of the GEF allocation as of 30 September 2024 was USD 4 751 525, which was 93.3 percent of the portion of the GEF funds that they received under the execution agreement (USD 5 091 800). Activities were continued during the fourth quarter of 2024. Therefore, the PMO expects that the final disbursement level will be close to 100 percent. Reporting on the disbursement of the portion of the GEF allocation retained by FAO (USD 197 200) was not available.

62. The project document identified nine project risks ranging from low or negligible to medium and listed detailed mitigation measures for these. Management of these risks was reported annually through the Programme Implementation Reports (PIRs). For each risk, mitigation actions and progress against mitigation actions were provided. New risks were

also added, as identified, and these were tracked in the subsequent PIRs. This was an effective risk management process.

3.3.1 Implementation

Rating: SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 3.2. How is FAO monitoring progress and the technical quality of the work of the operational partner? Is the Budget Holder/project team appropriately equipped to monitor and oversee the operational partner? Does it get support if needed? Does it lead to the implementation of corrective actions and the improvement of identified weaknesses?

Finding 9. FAO effectively delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal preparation, approval, oversight and supervision. There were significant delays in start-up.

63. The project identification and preparation for this project were generally good. FAO played an important role in providing expertise and experience. The project was generally well designed to deliver the identified global environmental benefits (see Finding 6). The objective was feasible and relevant, with some specific shortcomings in the intervention logic.

64. There was a delay at start-up that lasted more than two years between Chief Executive Officer endorsement and project commencement (see Finding 7). This delayed the launch of important interventions in the project area. In fact, the project delivery became unsynchronized with the other 6+1 programme projects.

65. The project taskforce met as needed, approximately quarterly, and was proactive in supporting the project. The Evaluation Team found during interviews that the level of engagement among FAO China personnel, the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and the GEF Technical Officer with this project was above average. Very close attention was paid during implementation to the strategic aspects of the project, progress with implementation and M&E, the technical quality of the work, and problem solving as challenges arose. For example, the Evaluation Team understands that the project taskforce members played an important role in guiding the project when it repositioned to address socioeconomic impacts of the Yangtze River system fishing ban and when the opportunity was identified to respond to major climate change risk to the biodiversity of the Poyang Lake wetlands (see Finding 16). There was a strong sense of ownership of the project's achievements among backstopping staff.

66. The Budget Holder and delegated staff provided strong support and had appropriate resources and expertise to monitor and oversee the operational partner.

67. Feedback during interviews about FAO's oversight and support was positive. This indicated that personnel were responsive and addressed implementation challenges. A good level of support was available from FAO China and the Regional Offices. There were few on-site oversight visits by FAO personnel from late 2019 to 2023 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Personnel from FAO China, Regional Offices and FAO headquarters endeavoured to maintain regular contact with the PMO during this period via online communication.

68. FAO also provided proactive oversight for project completion and evaluation, with a focus on learning to improve future processes and programming and to scale up results.

69. Overall, the execution agreement between FAO and the PLNNR was efficiently administered. During interviews, interviewees from the Jiangxi Province Finance Department – which arranged execution agreement signing and received funding instalments from FAO that were then transferred to the PLNNR – noted that the processes involved with securing the release of funding instalments were inefficient and slow. These processes included the Jiangxi Province Finance Department printing and signing relevant documents and providing these to the PMO, which then forwarded them to FAO. The Jiangxi Province Finance Department waited for the funds to be received but were unable to track the transaction in the FAO system and were therefore uncertain about when the funds would be received. Further to this, it was indicated that it would be more efficient if the PMO could interact directly with the Nanchang Bank for receipt and handling of the GEF funds.

70. There were no other reports of concern about FAO processes and systems.

3.3.2 Execution

Rating: HIGHLY SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 3.3. To what extent have the executing agencies, including the selected operational partner, effectively fulfilled their roles and responsibilities in the management and administration of the project?

Finding 10. The PLNNR was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project. This occurred after a slow start and major improvements following the MTR.

71. At the time of this terminal evaluation, the PLNNR was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project. This was a significant achievement because, at the MTR, the execution performance was rated as moderately satisfactory. A highlight of the project’s performance was the considered response to the MTR recommendations in achieving vital improvements on key aspects of delivery (see Finding 11). Particularly important changes were: the appointment of full-time PMO staff, including a technical specialist; the expanded membership of the project steering committee; the preparation of a gender mainstreaming strategy; and an increased focus on the mechanism for achieving cross-sector coordination.

72. After start-up, a project steering committee was efficiently established in accordance with the membership described in the project document. An appointed project director became an excellent leader and a champion for the project.

73. In addition to having strong technical and protected area management capability, the PLNNR had strong administrative and project management capability. This meant that the PLNNR effectively discharged its role and responsibility in managing the project’s day-to-day activities and ensured the appropriate use of funds, procurement, and contracting of goods.

74. In accordance with the project document, annual workplans and budgets were developed based on the results-based multiyear workplan, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the project document. These were considered by the project steering committee.

75. Decision-making was transparent. The project progress reports (PPRs), the PIRs and the project steering committee minutes documented progress, challenges and changes to implementation. The project steering committee meetings were held annually and became more effective after the MTR, when membership was expanded (see Finding 11).

76. Implementation was results focused, with numerous project outputs being delivered through close collaboration with other parties.

77. The PLNNR met its obligations under the execution agreement with FAO. Feedback from FAO stated that cooperation with the PMO and the PLNNR was very good. There was a collaborative approach to delivery.

78. Other government partners also participated enthusiastically in the project. The Evaluation Team interviewed project steering committee members from four other provincial departments (see Appendix 1) and was very impressed by their understanding of the project, their appreciation of their agencies' roles, and their sense of shared ownership of the achievements.

Finding 11. The project carefully considered the responses to the MTR recommendations, which led to improvements in implementation.

79. There were 28 recommendations from the MTR, many of which were quite complex (see Appendix 8). The project used a careful approach. It considered each recommendation and noted whether each was accepted, partially accepted or not accepted, and provided justification. Most of the responses were appropriate, and there were some decisions to not accept a recommendation. In particular, the following responses were appropriate and led to improvements in delivery:

i. Recommendation 1 point 1 partially accepted, which led to an improved project steering committee and enhanced governance and cross-sector coordination;

ii. Recommendation 1 point 2 not accepted because the PLNNR continued as the executing agency, which led to a high level of performance by the PLNNR as executing agency, very good project delivery outcomes, and better provincial and local capacity;

iii. Recommendation 2 point 1 accepted because two consultants were engaged, which improved technical capacity and delivery;

iv. Recommendation 2 point 5, which resulted in a gender mainstreaming strategy and improved outcomes for gender equality; and

v. Recommendation 3 point 1 because this led to a no-cost extension, enabling the project to deliver all results and greater budget expenditure.

3.4 Effectiveness

Rating: HIGHLY SATISFACTORY

80. Appendix 5 details the assessment of progress against the indicators in the results framework and explains the verification of achievement for each indicator.

Finding 12. The project made highly satisfactory progress towards its objective: catalyse the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity.

81. The progress is summarized in the following points.

i. Management and protection were improved across the existing PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve – a total of 96 800 ha (Indicator 0.1 verified by official areas of the nature reserves and an assessment of the project's activities at these three nature reserves). Management and protection were also improved across an additional 185 736 ha in the Poyang Lake region. This expanded area also improved the monitoring of important species, such as the finless porpoise, through the establishment of seven new field stations. This significantly exceeded the target of 93 357 ha (Indicator 0.2 verified by areas covered by the new field stations, calculated from maps of the stations and their areas of influence, as well as discussions with some stakeholders at field stations).

ii. The area of wetland reserves outside the Poyang Lake region, which was strengthened through new provincial-level management, planning, information, financing and training frameworks, was increased by 5 662 ha (Indicator 0.3 verified by the three reserve areas and evidence of training and capacity building). Three county wetland reserves, the Lushan, Wannian and Yugan Nature Reserves, are now effectively managed and protected with adequate capacities and management plans in place (Indicator 0.4 verified by the management plan and evidence of capacity building for each nature reserve).

iii. The project achieved the target increases in the Ecosystem Health Index (EHI) for three wetland reserves: the PLNNR; the Guanshan National Nature Reserve; and the Jiangxi Yiyang Chinese Merganser Nature Reserve (Indicator 0.5 verified by viewing a report on the EHI analysis with an annex for each target nature reserve and consistent methodology followed).

iv. The target for a no net increase in illegal plantations and aquaculture operations was met. There were no reported illegal activities in the final reporting period (Indicator 0.6 verified by viewing the official stamped reports from 2017 used to set the baseline and 2024 for final reporting).

Evaluation question 4.1. To what extent did the project contribute to:

i. improving and consolidating the wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province?

ii. strengthening wetland protected area management capacity?

iii. strengthening institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage the consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province?

Finding 13. The project made satisfactory progress towards Component 1: improve and consolidate the wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province.

82. The project met all five indicators under Component 1: improve and consolidate the wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province (see Appendix 5). The achievement for Component 1 is satisfactory.

83. The progress is summarized in the following points.

i. The JPWPAMS was drafted and officially issued by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department. This provided important approaches, tools and processes for guiding the expansion and consolidated management of wetland protected areas in Jiangxi Province (Indicator 1.1 verified by viewing the JPWPAMS and the authorized issuance).

ii. An organic agriculture investigation and a report into ecotourism guidelines were developed and accepted by relevant provincial agencies (Indicator 1.2) and used in the pilot sites to guide the transfer of local fishers to alternative livelihoods in farming, cultivation and ecotourism (verified by viewing two relevant reports and correspondence dated October 2020 from the Jiangxi Culture and Tourism Department regarding the ecotourism guidelines). Ecocompensation guidelines and regulations were developed and accepted by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department (Indicator 1.3 verified through interviews and relevant documents).

iii. Improvements in management effectiveness across nine county-level wetland protected areas met or exceeded targets (Indicator 1.4 verified by viewing the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scorecards and discussions with the LTO). Three county forestry bureaus now implement activities in accordance with the approved management plans for wetland reserves: the Lushan, Wannian and Yugan Nature Reserves (Indicator 1.5 verified by a management plan for each nature reserve, and interviews confirmed the implementation of plans).

Finding 14. The project made highly satisfactory progress towards Component 2: strengthen wetland protected area management capacity.

84. The project met all eight indicators under Component 2: strengthen wetland protected area management capacity (see Appendix 5). The achievement for Component 2 is highly satisfactory.

85. The progress is summarized in the following points.

i. Improvements in management effectiveness across two national, the PLNNR and the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, and one provincial, the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve, wetland protected areas exceeded the targets (Indicator 2.1 verified by viewing the METT scorecards and discussions with the LTO). Management plans were approved and are under implementation for these wetland protected areas, which led to significantly improved management and conservation outcomes (Indicator 2.2 verified by viewing the management plan and detailed approval documentation for each nature reserve, and interviews confirmed the implementation of plans).

ii. The project researched and implemented a range of cost-effective wetland rehabilitation and restoration techniques through partnerships with researchers, other experts and local wetland managers (Indicator 2.3 verified by viewing interventions at site visits, interviews with experts and project personnel, and viewing technical reports). A wide range of results were achieved, which yielded practical, cost-effective recommendations for managing Poyang Lake wetlands for biodiversity – especially migratory birds. Many of these are now being applied by protected area staff and community members. Achievements under this indicator are a highlight of the project and a major reason for the progress against Component 2 being considered highly satisfactory. Highlights of the experiments and the cost-effective and practical management solutions include:

- maintenance and construction of sublakes, which are critical elements of the hydrology and ecology of Poyang Lake wetlands and provide vital habitat for migratory waterbirds;
- nature-based solutions, such as the construction of low dams to create new impoundments that provide habitat for migratory waterbirds;
- technological improvements for planting submerged vegetation as part of ecological restoration;
- a patent for a method to cultivate the aquatic plant *Vallisneria spinulosa* seed sources based on field conditions; and
- investigations into the palatability of sedge (*carex*) for migratory birds and trials of cutting it at different times to optimize the food source, leading to recommendations and active cutting at some field sites by protected area staff and community members.

iii. The targets for strengthening the capacity for protected area management within the PWEPA system were achieved (Indicator 2.4 verified by the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and the GEF capacity scorecard). The targets for the number of nature reserve staff at the PWEPA demonstration sites who received training were significantly exceeded (Indicator 2.5 verified by viewing and analysing training records).

iv. Thirteen co-management agreements between reserve field stations and village communities were signed, which exceeded the target of 11 (Indicator 2.6 verified by viewing 13 co-management agreements and discussing the implementation of co-management agreements during interviews). These co-management agreements were well received by villagers and provided an important model for collaboration between authorities and communities.

v. The number of illegal resource incidents in the three targeted PWEPA – the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve – was significantly reduced. No incidents were reported during the final reporting period (Indicator 2.7 verified by viewing formal enforcement records from 2017 for the baseline, as well as informal reporting on the lack of relevant incidents during the final reporting period). The Evaluation Team also heard several anecdotal reports during field interviews that there had been few or no illegal resource use incidents in the Poyang Lake wetlands over recent years.

vi. The project prepared species conservation plans for six significant species (Indicator 2.8 verified by viewing plans).

86. Also under Component 2, the project made substantial contributions to boost monitoring and patrolling in the wetland protected areas targeted by the project. These included the following.

i. Four, out of a total of 43 deployed, high-resolution closed-circuit television cameras were purchased in the PLNNR. This helped to enable state-of-the-art remote monitoring with artificial intelligence to identify and count migratory birds. This also enabled monitoring to be independent of weather and ground conditions. Technical expertise for this came from the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

ii. Drones to assist with patrolling, mainly for assessing water levels and trespassing activities, were purchased. This provided appropriate training and certification in their use.

iii. A van and boat to facilitate joint patrolling and enforcement activities between relevant sectors, especially at the county level, were purchased.

iv. Many groups received binoculars, cameras and other equipment for conducting surveys and monitoring.

v. Training and capacity building was provided in many different aspects to monitor migratory birds and wetland ecosystems.

vi. Salaries were provided for some community members as patrollers, including those transitioning from careers as fishers in response to the fishing ban policy.

Finding 15. The project made satisfactory progress towards Component 3: strengthen institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage the consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province.

87. Of the six indicators under Component 3, the project achieved five. Progress against the other was not determined (see Appendix 5). The achievement for Component 3 is satisfactory.

88. The target was significantly exceeded for the number of staff from all county forestry bureaus in the Poyang Lake region and three counties outside of it being trained in migratory bird monitoring and protection. This included: use of equipment; knowledge of relevant laws and regulations; identification of migratory birds; dissemination of information on laws, regulations and wetland conservation to the public; and cooperative management of county wetland reserves with the PLNNR field stations (Indicator 3.1 verified via a data file with details on training topics, the number of attendees and whether the participants were in or outside of the Poyang Lake region).

89. The Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System was established. It is operational for data sharing between protected area sites and providing information to sectoral agencies on improved wetland and protected area management (Indicator 3.2 verified through a live demonstration of the information system). This high-quality information system is being used by five protected areas – the PLNNR, the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve, and the Wannian, Lushan and Yugan Nature Reserves (Indicator 3.3 verified with five screenshots of the system in active use, each showing the name of a different institution embedded in the interface). Also, the target for the number of people who visited the site was met (Indicator 3.4 verified by viewing visitation data and discussions with the PMO).

90. The target of 30 000 visitors per year to visitor centres was achieved (Indicator 3.5). To verify this, the Evaluation Team reviewed visitor records from visitor centres that received support from the project to plan and upgrade their visitor displays: the PLNNR; the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve; and the Wucheng, Dahuchi, Wannian and Shahu Nature Reserves. Visitor numbers were low during the COVID-19 pandemic but increased to target levels in 2023 and 2024 (see Appendix 5).

91. The targets for improved understanding on the values of wetlands and the wetland protected area system, indicated by surveys on knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP), were all achieved or exceeded (Indicator 3.6 verified by the KAP final survey report).

3.4.1 Additionality

Evaluation question 4.2. What are the specific areas where the GEF support has contributed to additional or unintended results, and were these additional or unintended results positive or negative?

Finding 16. The project significantly contributed to additional results in three areas that were not envisaged in the project document. This led to positive outcomes: improved socioeconomic outcomes from the alternative livelihood interventions; enhanced preparedness for climate change among wetland management authorities; and the establishment of an important biannual International Birdwatching Week.

92. The project adapted its original focus on providing alternative livelihood opportunities for local communities by responding to the socioeconomic challenges posed by the fishing ban in the Yangtze River system (see Finding 4). Table 3 shows the total number of individuals and households that directly benefited from these livelihood interventions in the three target reserves. It includes the number of former fishers who now have alternative employment or direct income via the project's initiatives. In summary, 382 out of 999 direct beneficiaries (38 percent) were former fishers, and 103 out of 281 households that benefited (37 percent) were the households of former fishers. All of the former fisher beneficiaries were men as this was a male-dominated profession. The main modes of alternative livelihoods interventions were: employment on blueberry farms; involvement in a rice-duck-fish co-cultivation model; engagement in protected area and migratory bird patrolling; ecotourism, including running family restaurants and hotels; and pomelo (*Citrus maxima*) peel processing. This focus on former fishers was not envisaged in the project document because the fishing ban had not been enacted. This work was done in collaboration with the provincial and county Departments of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, which were responsible for overseeing the fishing ban and its implementation. This work was mentioned frequently during site visit interviews and was very well received by the communities. Many of these interventions will continue, especially those that are part of a functioning horticultural enterprise like blueberry farming. However, there is a risk that those who require ongoing inputs like salaries for patrolling will not continue.

Table 3. Breakdown of alternative livelihood intervention beneficiaries

Nature reserve	No. villages targeted	No. livelihood interventions	No. male	No. female	Total	No. households
PLNNR	7	8	525	384	909	262
Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve	1	2	15	9	24	9
Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve	2	3	34	32	66	10
Total	**10**	**13**	**574**	**425**	**999**	**281**
Former fishers			382	0	382	103

Source: Data provided by the PMO, analysis conducted by the Evaluation Team.

93. The project responded to climate change as a major risk to the biodiversity of the Poyang Lake wetlands. In 2023, the project worked with the Wetland Department of the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department to draft an Emergency Plan for Extreme Climate Events Affecting Wintering Migratory Birds in Poyang Lake. This was based on lessons learned from investigations into various adaptive management measures to manage migratory bird habitats in the face of climate risk, and provided guidance to wetland managers in the Poyang Lake area. The plan was issued by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department. It was not included in the project document but is a valuable contribution to the long-term management of the Poyang Lake wetlands.

94. The PMO actively assisted in organizing the first Poyang Lake International Birdwatching Week in 2019, the second in 2021 and the third in 2023. The events were organized by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department Wetland Division. This birdwatching festival and series of events was significantly expanded from previous local events and attracted thousands of domestic and international guests. FAO China also provided organizational support. Many senior personnel attended the events, including key figures from the Jiangxi Provincial Party Committee, the provincial government, relevant national ministries, the FAO Representation in China, and international and domestic experts. This also greatly enhanced the domestic and international public visibility of the GEF Jiangxi wetland project. The PMO also co-hosted the joint International Crane Protection and Practice Exchange among China, the Russian Federation and Mongolia, and the Poyang Lake Ecological Photography Exhibition as part of the 2023 birdwatching season. Although the project document included various training activities for birdwatching and bird identification and organizing birdwatching events, the scale of the International Birdwatching Week was significantly greater than envisaged.

3.4.2 Contribution of co-financing to results achievement

Evaluation question 4.3. To what extent did the planned co-financing materialize, and how did the shortfall in co-financing, or the realization of greater than expected co-financing, affect project results?

Finding 17. As of 30 June 2024, USD 39 449 585 of total co-financing was realized. This is 148 percent of the total amount committed in the project document – an additional USD 12.8 million. This extra co-financing meant that more management and monitoring of the region's wetlands and reserves occurred. The central government invested significantly in strengthening the capacity in biodiversity conservation and managing migratory bird habitats, constructing smart monitoring systems, and purchasing patrol equipment.

95. The committed co-financing contributions represented a broad range of activities and programmes: routine activities that provided the foundation for the management and monitoring of the wetlands and reserves in the region (Forestry Departments of Jiangxi Province, Duchang County and Nanchang City); investment to enhance facilities and practices (National Development and Reform Commission); targeted activities by an NGO partner (International Crane Foundation); and major central government-funded initiatives to address the restoration and management of wetlands.

96. An additional co-financing of USD 8 million was primarily from the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department (see Appendix 4). This was approved by the Jiangxi provincial government to ensure routine governmental and institutional operations during project implementation. The Ecological Function Improvement and Biodiversity Conservation Project of Northern Poyang Lake Wetland in Jiangxi Province project (USD 5.6 million contributed with no co-financing originally committed) was approved by the national central budget of China in 2022 to strengthen the capacity in biodiversity conservation. This involved managing migratory bird habitats, constructing smart monitoring systems and purchasing patrol equipment.

4. Sustainability

Rating: LIKELY

Finding 18. Important steps were taken during implementation to increase the likelihood that the results will be sustainable. Medium-term sustainability is considered highly likely. The main risk to sustainability is the limited progress made towards a sustainable, long-term financing mechanism and the funding gap to sustain and replicate the community co-management and alternative livelihood models. Therefore, overall sustainability is considered likely.

97. The project made many significant contributions to sustainability.

i. Important policies and plans were issued at provincial and other levels. Personnel from the executing agency, the PLNNR as a bureau within the provincial Jiangxi Department of Forestry, liaised with stakeholders in different agencies to gain their participation in both drafting these policies and plans and ensuring their formal issuance by the relevant agencies. This excellent cross-sector collaboration led to a strengthened policy and institutional environment and improved relationships that should continue after project closure.

ii. This cross-sector coordination was a highlight of the project. In particular, the project worked closely with the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department Wetland Division to reactivate the Jiangxi Provincial Wetland Management Coordination Committee – which existed on paper but had little substantive function. Five new member units were added to the committee, which now has a clear mandate and a workplan that clarifies the responsibilities and duties of provincial-level institutions. Also, wetland protection coordination groups were established in 11 cities and 100 counties in Jiangxi Province. During interviews, the Evaluation Team heard several reports of project personnel arranging the coordination of activities, including patrolling and enforcement activities between different agencies with related responsibilities. This is a very significant advancement for local-level cooperation, which had been reported as poor. The improved collaboration was both vertical – between different levels, that is, national, provincial, county and protected area – and horizontal, so across agencies.

iii. The project conducted multiple scientific research projects to strengthen the knowledge and capacity around innovative technologies for wetland protection. This equipped staff and protected areas with improved practices and decision-making tools for use after project closure, such as:

- planting wetland vegetation to ensure food supply for migratory birds and address the risk from climate change;
- cutting sedge at key times to optimize the food value for migratory birds;
- developing an early warning system of different water levels to address extreme weather events and inform management responses; and
- using artificial intelligence to efficiently identify bird species and count their numbers (which will be expanded in more protected areas to enhance the accuracy of M&E in the future).

iv. The project established channels of knowledge dissemination to enable continuous knowledge exchange and shared experiences. Relevant products include a handbook for Poyang Lake bird species, which provides information on each species and their conservation status. This facilitates patrolling and assists the public in recognizing the importance of protecting birds. Additionally, the project established several publicity and education centres and used social media and other methods to introduce wetlands, migratory birds and routine patrolling activities to different audiences.

v. The Jiangxi Wetland Information Management System provides a best practices system that enables the sharing of data between protected areas and provides information to relevant departments. This is used by five protected area agencies and will be maintained by the PLNNR after project closure.

vi. The GEF funds were generally well targeted to achieve a medium-term sustainability of benefits: vehicles; computers; bird survey equipment; and training and capacity building.

vii. The executing agency, the PLNNR, has a continual presence in the region and a very positive reputation following the project's success. This is an important benefit compared to many projects in which the presence of the executing agency ends when the project ends.

viii. Thirteen co-management agreements are in place and actively implemented. All feedback that the Evaluation Team heard from beneficiaries regarding these agreements was positive, and it is expected that they will continue after the project ends. This means that the constructive relationships between wetland reserve field stations and village committees will continue. This work leveraged innovative modalities of alternative livelihoods for local fishers in response to the Yangtze River system fishing ban. It aimed to assist the transition from traditional living modes to farming and cultivation, and to help sustain the development of local communities under the new policies.

98. Activity 2.2.4 of the project aimed to establish a sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA network. Upon project completion, a sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA reserves had not been established and embedded. Regardless, the project was proactive in promoting debate and knowledge sharing about sustainable financing and management. This included co-hosting a two-day workshop on Establishing and Implementing Sustainable Financing Mechanisms Capacity Building and the On-site Promotion of Jiangxi Province Wetland Resource Operation Mechanism Reform.

99. The main substantive progress towards sustainable financing was through Jiangxi Province's pilot wetland resource operation mechanism reform, known as wetland banking. This explores new modes of wetland ecological governance in nine pilot counties, including Nanfeng and Wannian. The Jiangxi Province Forestry Department manages this pilot. Wetland banking is a mechanism. If a development damages a wetland area, then that development must buy or restore another area as compensation. Methodologies and guidelines were established for the mechanism, and three cases are in place. This provided initial information on the potential of wetland banking to ecological benefits and a funding stream. The Evaluation Team inspected one of these sites: a restored wetland at the Wannian Protection Centre. The GEF project provided training sessions to stakeholders interested in participating in this trial in Wannian. Although this wetland banking pilot

made progress and showed interesting preliminary results, it is still a pilot and still does not have a sustainable financing mechanism.

100. Some progress was made on other financing mechanisms, especially policies relating to ecological compensation paid by the government to farmers who set aside part of their rice or lotus crop in the field for migratory birds in winter. The project assisted in developing this policy. However, there are funding gaps for replicating the community co-management and alternative livelihood models, especially those that involved inputs such as horticulture and aquaculture input, marketing assistance, capacity building and salaries for community members.

101. The project was successful in leveraging additional government funding for the conservation of wetlands and migratory birds, as well as the management of wetland protected areas. However, it is not clear to the Evaluation Team which of these government funding sources will continue after the project (see Finding 20).

Evaluation question 5.1. What is the degree of ownership of the project's achievements by the main actors at the institutional, regional and local level, and to what extent do they have the resources and interests to capitalize on the achievements beyond the duration of the project?

Finding 19. The degree of ownership of the project's achievements by the main actors is strong. Enthusiasm and pride in the local biodiversity is high. There is almost unanimous interest in the results continuing. However, the level of resources that are available to capitalize on the achievements is highly variable.

102. The degree of ownership of the project's achievements is generally strong. During interviews, most stakeholders expressed enthusiasm for the project results to continue. There was high awareness and a strong sense of pride among community members in their wetlands, migratory birds and other biodiversity.

i. Overall, the PLNNR as executing agency took very strong ownership. The project director, that is, the director of the PLNNR, demonstrated leadership by strongly supporting the project, chairing the project steering committee, and acting as a champion for the project and its outputs with other agencies. The agency will continue involvement in the management of the reserve as its core business.

ii. Provincial stakeholders took ownership by adopting and issuing relevant documents that had been developed and promoted by the project, for example, the JPWPAMS and the eco-compensation guidelines, and by reactivating the Jiangxi Provincial Wetland Management Coordination Committee (see Finding 18). This was important in mainstreaming the project's work across agencies. The committee, as well as the associated city- and county-level committees, will continue their functions with updated responsibilities. Some achievements will be continued and capitalized on through the operating budgets of the agencies. However, in the absence of a sustainable financing mechanism, there are limits to the extent in which continuing enhancements can occur to the management of the Poyang Lake wetland reserves.

iii. Nature reserve bureaus and protection stations took ownership by adopting protected area management plans, entering co-management agreements with villages to develop alternative livelihood opportunities, putting monitoring and patrolling activities in place, and using the Jiangxi Wetland Information

Management System. Those involved have the resources to continue some results, especially in the medium term (see Finding 18), but there will be funding gaps to replicate community co-management and alternative livelihood models.

iv. Villages took ownership by embracing the co-management agreements and benefits that arise from the alternative livelihoods. Local NGOs, such as the Geese Protection Society and the Wildlife Rescue Association in Duchang County, identified opportunities for benefits to their organization and connected this to income and alternative livelihoods for community members. Receiving payment for patrolling activities is one example. Community members have an interest in continuing these. However, when the GEF funding stream ends, it is likely that some supported activities like patrolling activities will not continue.

103. There were no direct national stakeholders, but the Evaluation Team interviewed personnel from the National Forest and Grassland Agency. These members were responsible for the national project under the 6+1 programme, which ended in 2019, and found a high level of continued interest in the results of this project.

Evaluation question 5.2. To what extent has the project identified, anticipated and planned for key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project benefits (financial, institutional, environmental, sociopolitical and others)?

Finding 20. The project developed a well-structured and logical exit strategy and sustainability plan. This should be updated by adding a risk-based analysis of the likelihood of sustainability and giving more attention to long-term sustainability, especially financial sustainability.

104. The project developed an exit strategy and sustainability plan. The Evaluation Team viewed a document dated December 2024 that aimed to provide strategic guidance for the gradual withdrawal of the project and to prepare key partners and stakeholders to continue the activities in a sustainable manner. The exit strategy and sustainability plan help the government to further institutionalize, replicate and scale up achieved important project outcomes, outputs and best practices, and to sustain their impacts and contribution. Criteria and indicators for project sustainability were included. A table at the end of the plan identifies priority project outputs to sustain it and listed several actions, targets, timelines, responsibilities and the need for financial support.

105. The exit strategy and sustainability plan did not include a risk-based analysis of the likelihood of sustainability. However, the PMO prepared a detailed risk-based sustainability analysis in the self-assessment report that was received by the Evaluation Team (see Appendix 9). This analysis assessed sustainability in relation to financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental risks. It included important experiences and recommendations under these categories that stemmed from project implementation.

106. Limited progress was made towards establishing a sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA reserves (Activity 2.2.4) and the conservation of Jiangxi Province wetlands and migratory birds (see Finding 18). Although the project was involved in a variety of approaches to financing mechanisms, especially wetland banking and ecological compensation for farmers, the exit strategy and sustainability plan only briefly referred to these. They did not provide a critical assessment of their potential to deliver wetland conservation outcomes across Jiangxi, nor did they identify next steps to build on their potential. Similarly, the exit strategy and sustainability plan did not propose mechanisms for addressing the funding gaps to sustain and replicate the community co-management

and alternative livelihood models (see Finding 18). Finally, although the exit strategy and sustainability plan referred generally to increased government funding leveraged by the project and the importance of this for financial sustainability, they did not provide clear information on the government financing sources that will continue after project closure and the results that will be sustained.

107. The exit strategy and sustainability plan were generally well-structured and logical. However, they should be updated with additional consideration for a risk-based analysis in the self-assessment report (see Appendix 9) and increased attention to long-term sustainability, especially financial sustainability and financing mechanisms.

5. M&E design and implementation

5.1.1 M&E design

Rating: SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 6.1. To what extent did the M&E plan sufficiently identify resources and budget for the M&E activities to align with the project's theory and M&E requirements?

Finding 21. The M&E plan at the time of project endorsement was generally practical and sufficient. However, the results framework did not contain gender-disaggregated targets.

108. The monitoring and reporting section (pp. 77–81) of the project document gave a detailed description and budget for the project's M&E. This included indicators, monitoring responsibilities and information sources, reporting schedules, and an M&E plan summary with a budget. The budget included: provisions for an inception workshop and report; the design and set-up of the project monitoring system with staff training; annual progress reviews and planning workshops; a multistakeholder replication workshop; the MTR; and the terminal evaluation. Field-based impact monitoring was excluded. Instead, it was reflected in the project activities.

109. The M&E plan included the standard FAO and the GEF M&E requirements. It was clear about responsibilities and timing. The M&E budget was USD 138 000, which is 2.7 percent of the GEF grant. This is a relatively low percentage for such projects, but it excludes the design, set-up and training of field-based impact monitoring. These aspects were included in the project activities.

110. The GEF-5 biodiversity 1 tracking tool was used to set a baseline with the METT for 12 reserves. Mid-term and end-of-project targets to improve management effectiveness for these reserves were set in the results framework. The tracking tool was to be used to assess progress towards these targets.

111. The project's M&E also included the use of the EHI to monitor wetland biodiversity health at three wetland protected areas. The EHI scores were developed during the project preparation grant phase, with baselines established and the MTR and terminal evaluation targets set in the results framework. Annex 9 of the project document detailed information on the EHI tool.

112. The M&E also included the use of the United Nations Development Programme and the GEF capacity scorecard to measure strengthened capacity for protected area management of all protected areas within the PWEPA system. The capacity scorecard was used during the project preparation grant phase to establish baselines and set the MTR and terminal evaluation targets in the results framework.

113. The results framework did not include any gender-disaggregated targets (see Finding 26).

114. The project document did not include any applicable GEF core indicators.

5.1.2 M&E implementation

Rating: SATISFACTORY

Evaluation question 7.1. Was information gathered systematically, in a timely manner and according to a robust methodology?

Finding 22. The M&E system was implemented in accordance with the M&E plan. The Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System will be an important long-term contributor to M&E in the Poyang Lake wetland reserves.

115. The project closely followed the M&E plan. The Evaluation Team viewed the following:

i. project inception report for the inception workshop that was held from 1 to 3 June 2017 in Jiangxi Province;

ii. annual workplans and budgets from 2018 to 2024;

iii. six-monthly PPRs, the first for the period from April to December 2017, which were subsequently prepared for all six-month periods from January to June 2024;

iv. annual PIRs from 2018 to 2024;

v. co-financing reports, namely annual reporting included in all PIRs;

vi. the GEF-5 biodiversity 1 tracking tool was prepared upon project endorsement, at mid-term and upon completion in a timely manner;

vii. the EHI, the United Nations Development Programme and the GEF capacity scorecard, which were also completed in a timely manner in accordance with the M&E plan;

viii. the MTR was completed in 2020; and

ix. this terminal evaluation.

116. The PMO also prepared a detailed self-assessment report that was provided to the Evaluation Team. This report contained reporting against the results matrix and the GEF criteria, useful insights and lessons learned. The PMO also provided various targeted documents and materials to provide evidence on progress towards different indicators. This was in response to frequent requests from the Evaluation Team.

117. Two minor changes to the results framework were reported in the 2021 PIR and in response to the MTR. These reported changes, however, were not followed through, as described in the following points.

i. It was reported that a development goal for the project was added: realize the coordinated and sustainable development of wetland protection and social economy in Jiangxi Province; promote ecological civilization; and contribute to the NFGA and Ministry of Ecology and Environment report on targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets. However, the Evaluation Team is not aware of any subsequent reporting against this new goal.

ii. Indicator 3.4 under Component 3 on the number of people per year who visit the wetlands database platform website to find data about wetlands in Jiangxi Province was reported as cancelled. However, this indicator was reported against in the subsequent PIRs and the received self-assessment report. It is considered achieved.

118. The PIRs and PPRs reported against the outputs, indicators and targets in a timely manner. The information for most indicators was collected according to a robust methodology that clearly related to the indicator and target. For some indicators, the source of the information provided as evidence to the Evaluation Team or the methodology used were unclear. With these indicators, the Evaluation Team asked for explanations, clarifications and additional data where necessary. These involved: Indicator 0.6 no net increase in the area of production activities; Indicator 2.7 reduced number of illegal resource use incidents; and Indicator 3.5 number of visitors per year to the Poyang Lake Nature Reserve Visitor Centre (see Appendix 5). It would have been beneficial if the methodology and data for these measures were defined and documented earlier in the project and provided to the Evaluation Team.

119. Although the results matrix had no gender-disaggregated targets, the PMO kept gender-disaggregated records of participation in project activities during implementation. The project would have benefited from and amended the results framework during implementation to formally include gender-disaggregated reporting.

120. One M&E specialist was employed under the project.

121. The Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System was a key component of the project's M&E. The database was established and operationalized under the PLNNR by networking key monitoring stations, enabling greater coverage of Poyang Lake for the collection of information and real-time tracking of factors such as bird populations, water levels, and trespassing. There was a dedicated officer under the PLNNR to manage the information system and interact with the sites and relevant bureaus.

Evaluation question 7.2. To what extent was the collected information used to inform decision-making, foster learning and support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?

Finding 23. Information from the M&E system was used to inform project implementation and foster learning.

122. The project effectively used reporting processes to track progress and adjust direction. In the PIRs, each outcome and output was given a progress rating and an action plan to address moderately satisfactory, moderately unsatisfactory, unsatisfactory and highly unsatisfactory ratings. This action plan identified when actions should be taken and by whom. These actions were largely followed.

123. The project steering committee was effective in its role to guide implementation and ensure the achievement of the outcomes and objectives. The four project steering committee members interviewed by the Evaluation Team had a high understanding of the project and commented favourably on how the committee was supported by the PMO. This support included stating that the meeting papers were timely, that meetings were efficient, and that project steering committee matters focused on providing strategic oversight.

124. The project carefully considered the responses to the MTR recommendations, which led to improvements in implementation (see Finding 11).

6. Application of the GEF policies and guidelines

6.1 Environmental and social safeguards

Evaluation question 8.1. To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?

Finding 24. The project took appropriate steps to consider environmental and social concerns during design and implementation.

125. A brief one-page environmental impact assessment was included in the project document (p. 64). This concluded that "the project conforms to the pre-approved list of projects excluded from environmental assessment and that the project will have minimal or no adverse environmental or social impacts. No further analysis is required."

126. A social impact assessment was not undertaken as part of the project design, and an environmental and social management plan was not prepared. These were not required at the time of project development.

127. Although no environmental and social screening was reported in the project document, the PIRs reported against the following three environmental and social impacts identified upon Chief Executive Officer endorsement.

   i. Environmental and social safeguard 1. Natural resources management – Risk: low and moderate risk of land use conflicts between wetland and habitat conservation and local governmental socioeconomic development (rating: moderate-low);

   ii. Environmental and social safeguard 2. Biodiversity, ecosystems and natural habitats – Risk: impacts of the Poyang Lake Hydraulic Project on wetland habitats (rating: moderate); and

   iii. Environmental and social safeguard 3: Social and livelihood – Risk: social and livelihood risk emerged by implementation of the 10-year fishing ban (rating: moderate).

128. Reporting against these risks in the PIRs was appropriate.

129. The overall environmental and social safeguards risk classification was rated as low in 2018, and this was confirmed in all subsequent PIRs. There was no justification given in the PIRs for this rating being confirmed. However, since the project contributes positively to wetland habitats and took proactive measures to assist fishers affected by the 10-year fishing ban, the Evaluation Team considers the rating of low as appropriate.

Evaluation question 8.2. To what extent have local communities or Indigenous Peoples' communities been duly informed, consulted and involved in the decision-making process prior to project implementation?

Finding 25. It appears that during project design, there was only limited involvement of local communities in identifying the interventions detailed in the project document. However, during implementation, the local communities were extensively informed, consulted and involved in the decision-making process on the activities that would be undertaken at different locations.

130. Although the project document demonstrated extensive involvement of stakeholder groups and experts in project development, there was little evidence of local communities

being involved. Annex 8 of the project document analysed the socioeconomic conditions of communities surrounding Poyang Lake, which was used to provide recommendations that "ensure positive impacts for the beneficiary communities and local organizations" (p. 27). However, there was no mention of consultation with local communities to inform the project's interventions.

131. During implementation, the project consulted extensively with local communities before deciding on the activities that would be undertaken at different locations. From interviews with community members, it was clear that the project did not simply provide communities with a standard package of interventions. The project consulted with and surveyed villagers, village communities, local NGOs and local enterprises to explore the specific needs of each community and identify interventions that would support those needs. For this reason, a wide variety of interventions were provided. This included: assisting various horticulture and aquaculture enterprises; providing training and other support to run family restaurants and small hotels; and providing payment for protected area and migratory bird patrolling services. Importantly, the project included in its criteria the aim to assist the poorest community members and those affected by the Yangtze River system fishing ban.

132. There were no ethnic communities or Indigenous Peoples' communities identified in the project area, as identified in the MTR report and confirmed in the 2020 PIR.

6.2 Gender and inclusion

Evaluation question 8.3. Were gender equality and empowerment and other equity and human rights issues mainstreamed in the project, both in design and implementation?

Finding 26. The project document contained no gender-specific activities, no gender-disaggregated targets and no requirement to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy. However, the project was proactive in mainstreaming gender equality during implementation. This included the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy (as per an MTR recommendation) and provisions for gender-disaggregated reporting. Results were less clear about gender empowerment as this was not specifically mentioned or addressed.

133. The project contained no gender-specific activities, and the results framework contained no gender-disaggregated targets. It should be noted that, as a GEF-5 project, there were few formal requirements regarding the inclusion of such gender-related components in the project design. The socioeconomic analysis in Annex 8 of the project document included a section on the analysis of the potential influence of gender on the project. The text asserted that "gender balance will be prioritized in project implementation activities, including village committees, activities for the co-management of nature reserves, and training local residents, which will include activities that recognize the central role of women in livelihoods and in the home" (p. 56). However, there were no specific gender-related activities and no requirement for a gender mainstreaming plan or gender analysis.

134. Despite the limited treatment of gender issues in the project document, the project was proactive in this area. This was partly in response to the recommendation of the MTR. The project's efforts in this area are summarized in the following points:

i. arranged for project personnel to receive gender mainstreaming training;

ii. developed a report on gender mainstreaming that illustrated limitations and impact factors for women under different activities, including education and technology training – some case studies shared best practices on how to enhance women's participation in wetland protection;

iii. developed and implemented a gender mainstreaming strategy;

iv. placed a strong emphasis on ensuring equal participation for women in community consultation, community co-management, alternative livelihoods and capacity building activities;

v. specifically recruited women to some paid community patrolling roles; and

vi. prioritized women when selecting participants for activities such as nature education and wetland knowledge activities (for example, the Evaluation Team interviewed a woman who had received training from the project as a bird tourist guide).

135. The project collected gender-disaggregated data on participation in project activities and included gender-disaggregated reporting against the results framework, where relevant, even though the targets were not disaggregated.

Finding 27. Other human rights issues were mainstreamed into the project, especially through livelihood support for disadvantaged society members and former fishers affected by the Yangtze River fishing ban. Additionally, this mainstreaming proactively included youth in the activities.

136. The original project design included a strong component to direct alternative livelihood benefits for the poorer members of the target communities. This included employment and income generation opportunities.

137. This component of the project was adjusted to respond to the 10-year fishing ban in the Yangtze River system, which was imposed after the project had commenced (see Finding 4 and Finding 17). By working with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, project staff visited pilot villages, coordinated with local resettlement plans for retired fishermen and held community meetings to select alternative livelihood projects for local conditions. Implementation plans were developed and carried out to promote community development and address people's livelihood needs. The project achieved real results in providing socioeconomic benefits for some of these former fishers and their families (see Finding 16).

138. Also, the Evaluation Team heard during several interviews with community members that the project was proactive in including youth in the project's activities. The interviewed community members indicated that they saw the project as an opportunity to involve youth in alternative livelihood and income generation activities.

6.3 Project partnership and stakeholder engagement

Finding 28. The project built strong and sustainable partnerships and engaged effectively with stakeholders during implementation.

139. The project document described the involvement of national, provincial and local government agencies, protected areas, institutions, experts, and NGOs in project development. This involved workshops and briefings. However, there was little direct involvement of local communities (see Finding 25).

140. Annex 4 of the project document provided a stakeholder involvement plan with a table that presented all key stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities in the project. There was little information provided on how stakeholder engagement would occur, except for the proposed formation of the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee. This committee would operate at a high level to coordinate cross-sector cooperation between government agencies.

141. The project built strong partnerships and engaged effectively with stakeholders during implementation:

i. After slow, early progress towards the cross-sector coordination committee, which was a project highlight, it became possible to work with the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department in order to reactivate the Jiangxi Provincial Wetland Management Coordination Committee with five new member units.

ii. Representatives of the project steering committee from different provincial departments had high knowledge and ownership of the project's achievements.

iii. Collaboration between agencies with patrolling and enforcement responsibilities was greatly enhanced.

iv. Partnerships with research institutions made valuable contributions to the project (for example, investigations on planting wetland plants to ensure food for migratory birds and cutting sedge to create an optimal food source before migratory birds arrive).

v. There was a high level of trust in the partnerships between the participating villages, protected areas and local NGOs. This was reflected in 13 active co-management agreements.

142. Importantly, many of the partnerships are likely to continue after project closure. This will be important for the sustainability and replication of results.

6.4 Communications, knowledge management and knowledge products

Finding 29. The project developed a communications and knowledge sharing strategy. It implemented many communications and knowledge sharing activities: developing the wetland protected area information management system; undertaking study tours and knowledge sharing events; and delivering numerous awareness raising products and events.

143. A communications and knowledge sharing strategy was developed in November 2020 and updated in June 2023. The Evaluation Team viewed this strategy, which aimed to enhance the dissemination of knowledge products and best practices developed under the project. It identified key outcomes and potential channels for disseminating information at different levels, including audiences from the government, the general public and around the world. The strategy identified that multiple media would accommodate different audiences, such as International Birdwatching Week, to enhance public awareness during and after project closure.

144. The information management system being used by five protected areas (see Finding 15) is a key deliverable. This relates to documenting and sharing knowledge on wetland and protected area management.

145. The project also arranged various meetings and other knowledge sharing events, including on the 6+1 programme in 2018 and 2019. A study exchange programme for ten personnel from the Poyang Lake wetland protected areas was arranged to visit migratory bird stopover sites in other provinces and Mongolia. Siberian crane protection and the practice of international exchange activities was arranged among China, the Russian Federation and Mongolia.

146. The project established a variety of communications and awareness raising products:

i. various brochures and books on wetlands, Poyang Lake, migratory birds, fish and aquatic plants (the Evaluation Team was provided PDF versions of 21 brochures and pamphlets, and a hard copy of the bird identification aids);

ii. newsletters and media releases relating to project progress and specific events (the Evaluation Team was provided PDF versions of 23 newsletters);

iii. promotional and educational materials on the project, including billboards about interventions (the Evaluation Team viewed these in the field) and information on Poyang Lake wetlands and biodiversity (the Evaluation Team viewed some in the field and was provided PDF images of 33 signs);

iv. together with the International Crane Foundation and the Nanchang Municipal Committee of the Communist Youth League, the Discover the Beauty of Poyang Lake cultural and creative competition was co-organized (reported in the self-assessment report, and the Evaluation Team viewed some entries at an evening function in Nanchang);

v. public performances of sketches by the Caicha Opera Troupe in Poyang, Yongxiu, Duchang and Yugan Counties on the theme of protecting migratory birds (reported in the self-assessment report and the Evaluation Team viewed photographs of the event);

vi. various activities related to World Wetlands Day (the Evaluation Team viewed associated promotional material);

vii. assistance in organizing the Poyang Lake International Birdwatching Week (see Finding 16) (the Evaluation Team discussed with stakeholders, including the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department staff and local people, and viewed the associated promotional material).

147. The eco-compensation programme at Poyang Lake, to which the project made a substantial contribution, was one of three case studies featured in an FAO publication: Case Studies for Sustainable Wetland Agriculture and Related Water Management in China, Thailand, and Viet Nam (Li, Leshan, Wyatt and Trisurat, 2023). The project's LTO promoted these case studies at international forums and training sessions.

7. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned

7.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance and coherence. The project had high alignment with the country priorities and the GEF programme strategies. During the design, it made a weak contribution to the FAO CPF for China, but this contribution is now stronger. The project's aims and activities were highly relevant to the priorities of the executing agency and the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. This relevance increased significantly during implementation. The project's design and implementation were thorough in harmonizing actions by other actors, building lessons learned into the design of the project, adding value and avoiding duplication.

148. When designed, the project had strong alignment with the 2011–2030 NBCSAP. It continued to align with the updated 2023–2030 NBCSAP. The project was also consistent with many other current national strategies and plans, especially the Chinese Government's mission to establish an ecological civilization.

149. The project was consistent with the GEF focal areas, especially the GEF-5 biodiversity 1: improve the sustainability of protected area systems. It is now consistent with programming for the GEF-7 and the GEF-8 replenishments (see Finding 3). At the time of project design, the project's contribution to the FAO CPF for China was weak. Upon completion, the contribution to the current CPF was stronger, especially the two overarching objectives of agrifood systems resilience and transformation.

150. The project's focus on improving the management of wetland protected areas in the Poyang Lake region was highly relevant to the mandate of the executing partner, the PLNNR. The project was also highly relevant to the needs and priorities of community beneficiaries, with a strong focus on providing alternative livelihood opportunities for local communities. This was underpinned by co-management arrangements with local authorities. Furthermore, this relevance was enhanced during implementation with a new focus on benefiting former fishers who had been affected by a fishing ban in the Yangtze River system.

151. The intervention harmonized well with actions implemented by other actors, especially since the project design identified many other relevant actions and initiatives. In fact, lessons learned were built into the project design. This added value and avoided duplication. During implementation, the project worked well with other actors and projects. However, interaction with the 6+1 programme was limited due to the project's late start.

Conclusion 2. Efficiency. There were significant delays at start-up as the execution agreement was negotiated between the executing agency and FAO. Thereafter, the project was efficiently implemented and cost effective. The project was successful at leveraging the GEF allocation to access significant additional resources, including enhanced levels of co-financing. The execution modality worked well. The project's results were excellent, and provincial and agency-level capacity were significantly strengthened.

152. There was a delay of over two years between Chief Executive Officer endorsement and the start of implementation in January 2017. The primary reason for this delay was the time required to negotiate the execution agreement for the project. At the time, FAO did not have a clear template or the relevant experience to negotiate an agreement for the indirect

execution modality. This was also the first time that the PLNNR had executed an international project of such size, and it was its first GEF project.

153. The project also experienced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions from 2020 to 2022. This primarily slowed financial expenditure. Progress on project results showed fewer delays.

154. The project successfully leveraged the GEF funding to bolster activities and achieve higher co-financing than originally committed – realized co-financing was 148 percent of that committed in the project document. The project was a very cost-effective use of the GEF allocation due to this successful leveraging and the wide range of results delivered.

155. Under the project's modality, the capacity of the PLNNR and other provincial, county and city agencies was enhanced. Measured increases in management effectiveness at 12 protected areas and capacity for protected area management at all of the protected areas in the PWEPA demonstrated this. Also, communication and collaboration between government agencies involved in managing Poyang Lake wetlands significantly improved. For these reasons, and given the excellent results achieved, the modality worked well.

Conclusion 3. Effectiveness. The project made highly satisfactory progress towards its objective and achieved all 25 indicators in the results framework. For some indicators, the targets were significantly exceeded – especially in the area of wetlands and reserves in the Poyang Lake area under improved management and protection, and in the number of people receiving training and capacity building.

156. Under the project's revised TOC (see Figure 2), three expected project outcomes were delivered through three project components.

157. Under the project's objective, the project improved management and protection across the existing target protected areas – the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve – and across an additional 185 736 ha in the Poyang Lake region. In addition, management was strengthened over 5 662 ha of wetland reserves outside the Poyang Lake region and three county wetland reserves – the Lushan, Wannian and Yugan Nature Reserves – which are now effectively managed and protected. The project achieved the target increases in the EHI for three wetland reserves, and the target for a no net increase in illegal plantations and aquaculture operations was met with no reported illegal activities in the final reporting period.

158. Under Component 1, the JPWPAMS was drafted and officially issued by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department. This provided important guidance for expanding and managing wetland protected areas. An organic agriculture investigation and a report into ecotourism guidelines were developed and accepted by relevant provincial agencies. These were used to inform alternative livelihood interventions and the provision of benefits to local fishers. Eco-compensation guidelines and regulations were developed and accepted by the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department, which guides the provision of compensation for farmers who benefit migratory birds by not harvesting all of their rice and lotus crops. The project also achieved significant improvements in terms of management effectiveness across nine county-level protected areas, two national protected areas and one provincial-level protected area (also an indicator under Component 2). Finally, under Component 1, three county forestry bureaus now implement activities in accordance with approved management plans for wetland reserves: the Lushan, Wannian and Yugan Nature Reserves.

159. Under Component 2, management plans were approved and are under implementation for wetland protected areas: two national and one provincial. This significantly improved management and conservation outcomes. The project researched and implemented a range of wetland rehabilitation and restoration techniques. This yielded practical, cost-effective recommendations for managing Poyang Lake wetlands for biodiversity, especially migratory birds. Many of these are now being applied by protected area staff and community members. The project significantly strengthened capacity on protected area management for protected areas within the PWEPA system and significantly exceeded the targets for the number of nature reserve staff at the PWEPA demonstration sites that received training. Also under this component, 13 co-management agreements between reserve field stations and village communities were signed. These provided an important model for collaboration between authorities and communities. The number of illegal resource incidents in the three targeted PWEPA protected areas – the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve – was significantly reduced, with no such incidents reported during the final reporting period. Finally, under Component 2, the project prepared species conservation plans for six significant species, including the finless porpoise, the Chinese water deer and four migratory bird species.

160. Under Component 3, many staff members were trained in migratory bird monitoring and protection. The Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System was established and is operational for data sharing between protected area sites and providing information to sectoral agencies to improve wetland and protected area management. This is being used by five protected areas. The target for the number of people who visit the site was met. The target of 30 000 visitors per year to visitor centres was met. A significantly improved understanding of the value of wetlands and the wetland protected area system was achieved, as measured by the KAP surveys.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability. Important steps were taken during implementation to increase the likelihood that results will be sustainable. Medium-term sustainability is considered highly likely. The main risk to sustainability is the limited progress made towards a sustainable long-term financing mechanism and the funding gap to sustain and replicate the community co-management and alternative livelihood models. Therefore, overall sustainability is considered likely.

161. Significant contributions to sustainability include: a strengthened policy and institutional environment; excellent cross-sector coordination and a revitalized provincial-level government coordination committee; practical and cost-effective wetland management practices implemented by protected area staff and community members; and knowledge sharing channels to enable continued knowledge and experience exchange. The Jiangxi Wetland Information Management System provides a best practices information management system that enables the sharing of data between protected areas. This is being used by five protected areas. The GEF funds were well targeted to achieve a medium-term sustainability of benefits, especially equipment and capacity building. The executing agency, the PLNNR, has an ongoing presence in the region and a very positive reputation following the project's success. Thirteen co-management agreements between communities and the protected area field stations are in place and actively implemented.

162. There was less progress towards long-term sustainability. The project contributed to a provincial-level trial of wetland banking in Jiangxi. This has shown some interesting preliminary results around a market for wetland protection and restoration. Also, the

project assisted in developing policy to inform the ecological compensation paid by the government to farmers who set aside part of their rice or lotus crop in the field for migratory birds in winter. However, a sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA reserves is not in place. Also, there are funding gaps to sustain and replicate the community co-management and alternative livelihood models, especially those that involve inputs such as horticulture and aquaculture, marketing assistance, capacity building and salaries for community members.

Conclusion 5. Gender equality and other equity and human rights issues. The project document contained no gender-specific activities, no gender-disaggregated targets and no requirement to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy. However, the document was proactive in mainstreaming gender equality during implementation. This included the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy and provisions for gender-disaggregated reporting. Also, other human rights issues were mainstreamed into the project, especially by providing livelihood support for disadvantaged society members and former fishers affected by a ban on fishing in the Yangtze River system.

163. The project document contained no gender-specific activities, no gender-disaggregated targets and no requirement to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy. Despite this, the project was proactive in this area, especially after the MTR. In particular, the project provided gender mainstreaming training to project personnel, developed a report on gender mainstreaming and a gender mainstreaming strategy, and applied a focus on equal participation for women in most activities. The latter involved recruiting women for community patrol roles and prioritizing women when selecting participants for activities like nature education and wetland knowledge activities. Despite no disaggregated targets, the project collected gender-disaggregated data on activity participation.

164. The original project design included a strong component of directing alternative livelihood benefits to the poorer members of the target communities. This component was enhanced to respond to the 10-year fishing ban in the Yangtze River system, which was imposed after the project had started and led to hardship for individuals and households dependent on that profession. The project achieved real results in providing socioeconomic benefits for some of these former fishers and their families.

7.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. (PMO – immediate). The exit strategy and sustainability plan should be updated and implemented with attention to the following:

i. include the risk-based analysis of sustainability from the self-assessment report, which was provided by the PMO to the Evaluation Team; and

ii. consider long-term sustainability, especially what can be done to strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of improved protection for the Jiangxi wetlands and migratory birds.

165. The project developed a well-structured and logical exit strategy and sustainability plan (see Finding 20). However, this did not include a risk-based analysis of the likelihood of sustainability. The PMO developed a detailed risk-based sustainability analysis in the self-assessment report, which was received by the Evaluation Team (see Appendix 9).

166. There was limited progress towards a long-term sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA reserves and the Poyang Lake wetlands and migratory birds. However, this was not

considered in detail in the exit strategy and sustainability plan (see Finding 18 and Conclusion 4).

167. The exit strategy and sustainability plan would benefit from an update with attention to these considerations (see Finding 20).

i. Include the risk-based analysis of sustainability from the self-assessment report.
ii. Provide a critical assessment on the potential of wetland banking, ecological compensation and other relevant mechanisms to deliver wetland conservation outcomes across Jiangxi, and identify next steps to build upon their potential.
iii. Propose mechanisms to address the funding gaps for sustaining and replicating the community co-management and alternative livelihood models.
iv. Provide clear information on the government financing sources that will continue after the project ends, as well as the project results that will be sustained.
v. Outline any other recommendations regarding sustainable financing that arise from the project's results and experiences.

Recommendation 2. (PMO – immediate). A final project technical workshop with many stakeholders should be held in Jiangxi to enhance the transfer of knowledge and lessons learned from the project to key experts and organizations. This should include inviting representatives from other provinces or relevant sectors to enhance knowledge sharing at the national, provincial and local levels, as appropriate.

168. Over seven years of implementation, the project accumulated many best practices and lessons that strengthen protected area management and biodiversity outcomes, especially in: protected management and planning; wetland restoration and management; migratory bird management and monitoring; community co-management; and policy development. It is recommended that a final technical workshop be held soon, while the project is still fresh, in order to share knowledge and explore future opportunities with stakeholders from across China.

169. This should be included in the exit strategy and sustainability plan.

Recommendation 3. (PMO, PLNNR and FAO – in 2025). The project's results will be of great interest to international audiences and within FAO, so opportunities should be developed to share the knowledge and lessons learned with international audiences and internally within FAO.

170. The publication Case Studies for Sustainable Wetland Agriculture and Related Water Management in China, Thailand, and Viet Nam (Li, Leshan, Wyatt and Trisurat, 2023), in which the Poyang Lake eco-compensation programme is included, is promoted at events by the LTO. This is a good example of how such knowledge sharing can occur.

171. Other best practices that can be shared include conducting ecological research to generate practical and cost-effective wetland management recommendations.

172. Examples of wetland management practices that were put in place include maintaining and constructing sublakes, providing nature-based solutions to create migratory bird habitats, planting aquatic plants such as *Vallisneria spinulosa* and cutting sedge at strategic times to optimize the food source for grazing birds.

7.3 Lessons learned

173. The project achieved excellent results after facing initial challenges due to delays and slow progress with some key aspects. To assist in understanding why the project was so successful, the Evaluation Team identified the following success factors that can be strongly promoted as lessons learned.

i. There was very good coordination of stakeholders, both vertical (between stakeholders at the national, provincial, county, city, reserve and village levels) and horizontal (across agencies and institutions, especially at the provincial level).

ii. The executing agency, the PLNNR, has:
   - deep connections with the community;
   - an ongoing presence in the community;
   - high levels of respect among government bureaus and other sectors;
   - very good technical skills in addition to robust project management and administrative capacity; and
   - a pragmatic attitude and flexible strategy under significant policy changes.

iii. The project director was very committed to the project and a proactive champion of it.

iv. The project steering committee was very engaged, and individual members had high levels of understanding and ownership of the project’s aims and achievements.

v. The project considered responses to the MTR recommendations and acted on these. This included not accepting some significant ones. Ultimately, this led to very important improvements.

vi. The project collaborated well across borders on knowledge sharing with other Chinese provinces and other countries, especially the Russian Federation and Mongolia.

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Appendix 1. People interviewed

Surname	First name	Position and organization	Time and place of interview
1. Active stakeholders with the authority to make decisions related to the project			
FAO China, the GEF and FAO			
Ahuja	Vinod	Budget Holder, FAO Representative	17 December 2024, online
Chunsheng	Yao	FAO-GEF Portfolio Manager	30 October 2024, Beijing
Executing agency and PMO			
Liu	Yonggong	Chief Technical Adviser (Consultant)	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Xiong	Chaoyi	Project Manager, Deputy Director General PLNNR	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Xu	Zhiwen	Director General PLNNR, Director PMO	25 October 2024, Nanchang
2. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project			
FAO backstopping officers, technical advisers, etc.			
Li	He (F)	LTO	2 November 2024, Bangkok
Yurie	Naito	GEF Technical Officer	21 November 2024, online
Implementation partners and project steering committee members			
Ao	Qingxing	Official, Jiangxi Provincial Forestry Department Project Steering Committee Member	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Cai	Shuling	Staff member of the Lushan Liaohuachi County Nature Reserve, Project Focal Point	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Hua	Qi	Official, Jiangxi Provincial Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department Project Steering Committee Member	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Li	Zhe	Project Steering Committee Member International Crane Foundation Project Officer The International Crane Foundation is a main project partner.	24 October 2024, online
Peng	Yu'er	Staff Member Wannian Huyun County Nature Reserve Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities at the Huyun Nature Reserve	29 October 2024, Wannian County
Ren	Hong	Official, Jiangxi Provincial Finance Department Project Steering Committee Member	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Wang	Dao	Director General Wannian Huyun County Nature Reserve, Project Focal Point Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities at the Wannian Huyun Nature Reserve	29 October 2024, Wannian County
Wu	Jiaqi	Official, Jiangxi Provincial Water Resources Department Project Steering Committee Member	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Wu	Yanliang	Director General Yugan Kangshan Lake County Nature Reserve, Project Focal Point Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities at the Yugan Nature Reserve	29 October 2024, Yugan County

Surname	First name	Position and organization	Time and place of interview
Xia	Shaoxia	In charge of the "Science and Technology Project of Beautiful China Ecological Civilization" Staff member of the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences	24 October 2024, online
Three pilot nature reserve staff			
Guo	Huicai	Staff Member Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, Focal Point for biodiversity monitoring issues	25 October 2024, Nanchang
Luo	Hao	Staff Member Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, Focal Point for biodiversity monitoring issues and in charge of vegetation growing test	26 October 2024, Wucheng
Shi	Shuiping	Director Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve, Project Steering Committee Member, Project Focal Point Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities at the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve	27 October 2024, Duchang County
Wan	Qing	Deputy Director General of the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, Project Steering Committee Member, Project Focal Point Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities at the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve	25 October 2024, Nanchang
3. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)			
Project consultants			
Yu	Xiubo	Climate change and wetland rehabilitation Provided technical guidance on piloting wetland restoration at Poyang Lake, conducted studies on climate and hydrologic change impacts, and formulated a mitigation plan	23 October 2024, Beijing
Other government entities			
Yuan	Jun	In charge of the GEF's Main Streams of Life national-level project Official, Forestry Investigation and Planning Institute under the NFGA Responsible for coordination on the implementation of the GEF's Main Streams of Life national-level project	23 October 2024, Beijing
4. Stakeholders at the grassroots level who benefited directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)			
Chen	Ren	Beneficiaries at PLNNR Beneficiary of alternative livelihood activities at PLNNR (growing grapes and watermelon seeds)	26 October 2024, Wucheng Township

Surname	First name	Position and organization	Time and place of interview
Chen	Yulin	Beneficiary of alternative livelihood activities at PLNNR (integrated rice-duck-fish farming)	27 October 2024, Shahushan Village
Zhang	Haiping	Beneficiary of alternative livelihood activities at PLNNR (plant blueberries)	26 October 2024, Wucheng Township
Zhang	Rensi	Beneficiary of alternative livelihood activities at PLNNR (integrated rice-duck-fish farming)	27 October 2024, Shahushan Village
		Beneficiaries at the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve	
Li	Chunru	Beneficiary at the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve In charge of migratory bird rescue clinic	28 October 2024, Duchang County
Xu	Xiaohua	Beneficiary of alternative livelihood activities at the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve (recreational farm-stay house)	28 October 2024, Duchang County
Duan	Qingxian	Poyang Lake Wildlife Rescue Association, Duchang County Involved in project community co-management activities at the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve	28 October 2024, Duchang County
Wu	Minyao	Deputy Director General Kangshan Reclamation Farm	29 October 2024, Yugan County
Zhang	Cheng	Conservation International Foundation Subcontractor for developing school wetland education protection curriculum	30 October 2024, online

Appendix 2. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table

The GEF criteria/dimensions	Rating	Summary comments
A. OUTCOMES (relevance, coherence, effectiveness and progress towards impact, efficiency)	**HS**	The outcomes exceeded the targets, and they were highly relevant and cost effective. Excellent use was made of the GEF funds to leverage other funding and partnerships. Work on building cross-sector collaboration was of high quality and vital for sustainability. The executing agency, the PLNNR, was exemplary. The implementing agency, FAO, was very good.
A1. Relevance	**HS**	The project remained highly relevant, even ten years after it was developed. It became even more relevant because the project adapted activities and approaches to meet changes in the policy and environmental context (e.g. the Yangtze River fishing ban and extreme drought conditions). It responded well to the needs of the beneficiaries (see Subsection 3.1).
A2. Coherence	**S**	The project harmonized well with the actions implemented by other actors, especially since its design was very thorough in identifying other relevant actions and initiatives and building in lessons learned. During implementation, the project worked well with other actors and projects but interaction with the 6+1 programme was limited (see Subsection 3.2).
A3. Effectiveness	**HS**	The project met all targets and exceeded some. The connection between policy outcomes, ecological outcomes and social outcomes, especially alternative livelihoods, was a feature. Progress towards the objective of catalysing the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity was very good (see Subsection 3.4).
A4. Efficiency	**HS**	The project was a very cost-effective use of USD 5 million of the GEF funds. This was due to excellent leveraging of additional funding sources and constructive partnership development. The execution modality worked well. Provincial and agency-level capacity were strengthened (see Subsection 3.3).
B. SUSTAINABILITY (financial, sociopolitical, institutional and governance, environmental dimensions including risks to sustainability)	**L**	Although the likelihood of medium-term sustainability is considered highly likely, less substantial contributions were made to long-term sustainability. There was only limited progress towards a sustainable long-term financing mechanism. For this reason, the overall likelihood of sustainability is assessed as likely (see Section 4).
C. IMPLEMENTATION	**S**	As the GEF implementing agency, FAO met expectations and had no significant weaknesses. FAO supervised the project well and played an important, supportive role in the project's adaptive management responses (see Subsection 3.3.1).
D. EXECUTION	**HS**	Executing agency performance was exemplary, especially after the MTR. Despite delays from start-up and the COVID-19 pandemic, the results were timely and highly efficient. The executing agency provided a high-quality combination of project management capability and technical capacity. It had a good reputation among the Poyang Lake community and other agencies, which meant it was well positioned for this role in the project. Indeed, this role within the community was strengthened during the project. The relationship with the GEF

The GEF criteria/dimensions	Rating	Summary comments
		agency, FAO, was strong and constructive (see Subsection 3.3.2).
M&E plan	**S**	The M&E plan in the project document was generally practical and sufficient. Clear M&E workplans and strategies were established and specified in various subcontracts (see Subsection 5.1.1).
M&E implementation	**S**	The M&E implementation followed the M&E plan well, and progress was reported clearly by the Programme Implementation Reports (PIRs), the project progress reports (PPRs) and other records (see Subsection 5.1.2).
Overall project rating	**HS**	

Appendix 3. The GEF rating scheme and descriptors

As mentioned in Section 3.1 of the terms of reference template, the overall rating of the project outcome will be based on the following criteria: relevance; coherence; effectiveness; and efficiency. Appendix Table 1 presents performance descriptors[3] for each specific rating. In most instances, actual performance may not fully correspond to any of the rating descriptions. Therefore, a rating will be based on the description that provides the best fit based on the evidence. Where available evidence is insufficient to provide a rated performance, the performance will be rated as unable to assess. The performance will be rated on a six-point scale.

Appendix Table 1. Outcomes ratings

Ratings	**Description**
Highly satisfactory (HS)	*The outcomes exceed targets, and they are highly relevant and cost effective.*
Satisfactory (S)	*The level of outcomes achieved meets the targets. The outcomes are relevant and cost effective.*
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	*The level of outcomes achieved is generally close to the targets. The majority of the targets were met or almost met, but some were not. The outcomes are generally relevant and cost effective.*
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	*Overall, the level of outcomes achieved is lower than the targets, but some outcomes were substantially achieved. The outcomes are generally relevant but not sufficient given the costs or, alternatively, generally cost-effective but not adequately relevant.*
Unsatisfactory (U)	*The expected outcomes were not achieved, or achievement was substantially lower than expected, and/or the achieved outcomes were not relevant. Alternatively, the outcome was cost ineffective compared to alternatives.*
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	*A negligible level of outcomes was achieved and/or the project had substantial negative consequences that outweigh its benefits.*
Unable to assess (UA)	*The available information does not allow for an assessment of the level of outcome achievement.*

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability will be assessed, taking into account the risks related to the financial, sociopolitical, institutional and environmental sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability will be assessed using a six-point scale:

Appendix Table 2. Sustainability ratings

Rating	**Description**
Highly likely (HL)	*There is negligible risk to the continuation of benefits and, based on the progress made so far, it is expected that the long-term objectives of the project will be achieved.*
Likely (L)	*Either there is negligible risk to the continuation of benefits or there are some risks, but the magnitude of their effect is too small and/or the probability that*

[3] The 2022 final draft of the GEF terminal evaluation guidelines (GEF, 2022) presents new descriptors that are reported here.

Rating	Description
	they will materialize is too small. Overall, it is likely that the net benefits of the project will continue.
Moderately likely (ML)	*There are some risks to sustainability, and they may have some effect on the continuation of benefits if they materialize. However, the probability of materialization of these risks is low. Net benefits are more likely to continue than abate.*
Moderately unlikely (MU)	*There are significant risks to sustainability. The effect on the continuation of benefits would be substantial if these risks materialize, and the probability of the materialization of these risks is significant. Overall, net benefits of the project are likely to abate.*
Unlikely (U)	*Because of the high risks it is unlikely that net benefits of the project will continue to accrue, and the progress made so far is likely to be lost. It is unlikely that the project will achieve its long-term objectives.*
Highly unlikely (HU)	*It is expected that the project will not achieve its long-term objectives. Major risks have either already materialized and halted the accrual of net benefits or have a high probability of materializing soon and will halt the accrual of net benefits when they materialize.*
Unable to assess (UA)	*Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.*

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EXECUTION

Quality of implementation and of execution will be rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF agencies that have direct access to the GEF resources. Quality of execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received the GEF funds from the GEF agencies and executed the funded activities on the ground (this could be the very same FAO with co-executor partners or an executing partner identified by an FAO operational agreement). The performance will be rated on a six-point scale.

Appendix Table 3. Implementation and execution ratings

Ratings	Implementation	Execution
Highly satisfactory (HS)	Performance of the GEF agency was exemplary. Project preparation and implementation were robust. The agency ensured that relevant GEF policies were applied in project preparation and implementation. Project supervision was strong. The agency identified and addressed emerging concerns in a timely manner. The agency ensured that project implementation stayed on track and project activities were completed on time.	Performance of the executing entity was exemplary. Execution of project activities was timely and of high quality. Relevant GEF policies and requirements were adhered to. Guidance from the GEF agency was followed, and any corrective actions required were taken promptly. Measures were undertaken to mitigate risks to sustainability, and steps were taken to support follow-up to the project. Project activities were completed on time.
Satisfactory (S)	Performance met expectations and did not have any salient weaknesses. Project preparation and implementation were robust, and relevant GEF policies were applied. The GEF agency supervised the project well. It identified and addressed emerging concerns in a timely manner. The agency ensured that project implementation was on track.	Performance met expectations and did not have any salient weaknesses. Execution of project activities was timely and of good quality. Relevant GEF policies and requirements were adhered to. Guidance from the GEF agency was followed. Measures were undertaken to mitigate risks to the sustainability of project outcomes.
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	Performance had some weaknesses but met expectations overall. Project preparation and implementation were adequate, and relevant	Performance had some weaknesses but met expectations overall. Execution of project activities was generally timely but with some

Ratings	Implementation	Execution
	GEF policies were applied – despite some weak areas. Project supervision was adequate. The GEF agency identified and addressed emerging concerns, but some may have been inadequately addressed. Project implementation had minor delays, and a few activities may have been dropped.	instances of delay. Relevant GEF policies and requirements were adhered to, but some minor slipups may have been observed. Guidance from the GEF agency was followed, and problems were fixed. There were some areas for improvement in execution.
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	Performance did not meet expectations, even though there were some areas of solid performance. Project preparation and implementation had weaknesses, but these were not too severe. Project supervision was somewhat weak. Even though the GEF agency identified most emerging concerns, many remained unaddressed or inadequately addressed. Project implementation was delayed, and a few activities were dropped or reduced in scale because of issues that were largely under agency control.	Performance did not meet expectations, but there were some areas of solid performance. Execution of project activities was delayed, and executing entity capabilities observably limited project execution. Several slipups in adherence to GEF policies and requirements were observed. Guidance from the GEF agency was generally followed and problems were fixed, but such actions usually were not timely. There were several areas for improvement in execution.
Unsatisfactory (U)	Performance did not meet expectations. Project preparation and implementation were weak. Project supervision was weak. Emerging concerns were not identified in time and remained unaddressed or inadequately addressed. Activities were not implemented in time or were not undertaken. Project implementation was delayed, and several activities were dropped or reduced in scale.	Performance did not meet expectations. Execution of project activities was delayed, and at least some activities were dropped due to factors largely under the control of the executing entity. Many slipups were observed in adherence to the GEF policies and requirements. Guidance from the GEF agency was not put into practice, or was applied with considerable delay.
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	Performance had severe shortcomings. The GEF agency mismanaged project implementation, and its supervision was poor. Emerging concerns were not identified in time, including those that should have been obvious. Although instances of mismanagement were discovered, corrective actions were not undertaken. Project activities were poorly implemented, and several had to be dropped.	Performance had severe shortcomings. There were several instances of mismanagement by the executing entity. Emerging concerns were not addressed in time, including those that should have been obvious. Most activities were very poorly executed and/or experienced delays, and some activities were dropped. The GEF policies and requirements were not applied.
Unable to assess (UA)	The available information is not sufficient to rate performance.	The available information is not sufficient to rate performance.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Quality of project M&E will be assessed in terms of: i) quality of the design of the project's M&E plan; and ii) the quality of the project's M&E during implementation. Appendix Table 4 presents relevant descriptors for each rating.

Appendix Table 4. Monitoring and evaluation ratings

Ratings	M&E plan	M&E implementation
Highly satisfactory (HS)	The M&E plan is a good practice and does not have any weaknesses. Its alignment with the project's TOC is robust. Complete baseline data have been provided. The specified indicators are appropriate, and arrangements for plan implementation are adequate. Overall, the M&E plan exceeds expectations and is exemplary.	M&E plan implementation was excellent. Weaknesses in the M&E plan, if present, were addressed promptly. M&E activities were conducted in a timely manner, and data from M&E were used to improve project implementation. Overall, M&E implementation exceeds expectations and was exemplary.

Ratings	M&E plan	M&E implementation
Satisfactory (S)	The M&E plan is robust and has no or only minor weaknesses. Its alignment with the project's TOC is robust. Baseline data are provided or their collection is planned at project start. The specified indicators are appropriate, and arrangements for M&E plan implementation are adequate. The plan meets expectations.	M&E plan implementation was generally robust. Weaknesses in M&E were addressed in a timely manner. M&E activities were conducted in a timely manner, and data from M&E were used in improving project implementation. Overall, M&E implementation meets expectations.
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	The M&E plan is solid overall. Its alignment with the project's TOC is solid. The specified indicators are generally appropriate, and arrangements for M&E plan implementation are adequate. There are areas where the M&E plan could be strengthened but, overall, it is adequate.	M&E plan implementation was generally robust, with some weaknesses. Weaknesses in M&E were generally addressed, but some remained. Some M&E activities were delayed. M&E data were used for reporting but had little use in improving project implementation. Overall, M&E implementation meets expectations with some areas of low performance.
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	The M&E plan is weak overall, but it has strengths in some areas. Its alignment with the project's TOC is somewhat weak. The specified indicators are generally appropriate, but additional indicators are required to adequately capture project results and/or arrangements to gather data on indicators that are not adequate. The plan needs several improvements to meet expectations.	M&E plan implementation was weak and/or did not address weaknesses in the original plan. Most M&E activities were completed, with some either dropped or delayed. M&E data were not reported in a timely manner, and there is little evidence to suggest that data were used to improve project implementation. Overall, M&E implementation does not meet expectations, but there are some areas of adequate performance.
Unsatisfactory (U)	The M&E plan has severe shortcomings. Its alignment with the project's TOC is weak. No baseline data are provided, nor is there any indication that these would be collected at project start. Indicators do not adequately address project outcomes and other results. Relevant indicators have not been specified for several results. There are gaps in arrangements for M&E plan implementation. Either no budget or an inadequate budget has been provided for M&E.	M&E plan implementation was flawed and/or did not address severe weaknesses in the original plan. Several M&E activities were either dropped or incomplete. The data collection methodology was not sound. M&E data were not reported in a timely manner, and there is little evidence to suggest that data were used to improve project implementation. M&E implementation does not meet expectations.
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	No M&E plan was prepared.	No or negligible M&E activity was implemented, other than conducting the project evaluation.
Unable to assess (UA)	Unable to assess because project documents are not available.	Unable to assess as the terminal evaluation does not cover M&E implementation adequately.

Appendix 4. The GEF co-financing table

Appendix Table 5. Co-financing table

Name of co-financer	Co-financer type	Type of co-financing	Co-financing at project start (Amount confirmed at the GEF Chief Executive Officer endorsement/approval by the project design team) (in USD)			Materialized co-financing at the project's terminal evaluation (Amount reported as of 30 June 2024) (in USD)		
			In-kind	**Cash**	**Total**	**In-kind**	**Cash**	**Total**
Office of Three Gorges	National government	Cash		7 530 000	7 530 000		4 137 000	4 137 000
National Development and Reform Commission	National government	Cash		1 600 000	1 600 000		1 600 000	1 600 000
Jiangxi Province Forestry Department	Provincial government	Cash		15 850 000	15 850 000		23 467 853	23 467 853
Duchang County Forestry Department and Nanchang City Forestry Department	Local government	In-kind	1 250 000		1 250 000	4 090 423		4 090 423
International Crane Foundation	NGO	Cash		142 000	142 000		142 000	142 000
Chinese Academy of Sciences, Science and Technology Project of Beautiful China Ecological Civilization	National government	In-kind	0		0	133 738		133 738
FAO	FAO	In-kind	320 000		320 000	320 000		320 000
Ecological Function Improvement and Biodiversity Conservation Project of Northern Poyang Lake Wetland in Jiangxi Province	National government	In-kind	0		0	5 578 571		5 578 571
Grand total (in USD)			1 570 000	25 122 000	26 692 000	10 102 732	29 346 853	39 449 585

Appendix 5. Progress against results framework

Indicators[i]	Baseline	End-of-project target	Level of achievement[ii]	Evaluation Team comments[iii]
Objective: Catalyse the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity				
0.1 Increase in the area of effective management and protection of wetlands in the Poyang Lake region, through the improvement in management and protection in existing protected area hectares (area within PLNNR, Nanji and Duchang reserves).	0 hectares	96 800 hectares	**Achieved** Improved management and protection in 96 800 ha of existing protected areas (which is the sum of the areas of PLNNR, Nanji and Duchang nature reserves).	Verified by official areas of the nature reserves and assessment of the project's activities in these three nature reserves.
0.2 Increase in the area of effective management and protection of wetlands in the Poyang Lake region, through the expansion of monitoring and patrolling (from six to seven newly established PLNNR field stations) outside of the boundaries of the PLNNR, Nanji and Duchang wetland reserves.	0 hectares	93 357 hectares Total: 190 157 hectares	**Achieved** Seven new field stations totalling 185 736 hectares (the sum of the hectare coverage of each new field station). The field stations were: Duchang, Yugan, Jiujiang, Hukou, Puoyang, Wannian and Jinxian. Total: 282 536 ha **Significantly exceeded targets.**	Verified by areas covered by the new field stations, calculated from maps of the stations and their areas of influence; also discussions with some stakeholders at field stations.
0.3 Increase in the area of wetland reserves outside of the Poyang Lake region that are strengthened through new provincial level management, planning, information, financing and training frameworks.	0 hectares	5 662 hectares	**Achieved** A total of 5 562 ha of wetland reserves outside the Poyang Lake region strengthened through new provincial level management, planning, information, financing and training frameworks. This comprised the sum of the areas of three nature reserves outside the Poyang Lake region: Yihuang,	Verified by the areas of the three reserves and evidence of training and capacity building provided.

Indicators[i]	Baseline	End-of-project target	Level of achievement[ii]	Evaluation Team comments[iii]
			Junshan Lake and Wucheng Reservoir.	
0.4 No. of county wetland reserves in the Poyang Lake region effectively managed and protected, with adequate capacities and management plans.	0 county wetland reserves	3 county wetland reserves	**Achieved** Three county wetland reserves effectively managed and protected, with adequate capacities and management plans in place. The county reserves are: Lushan, Wannian and Yugan. The management plans are detailed and include M&E, financing and four-year workplans.	Verified by management plan and evidence of capacity building for each nature reserve.
0.5 Improved score on Ecosystem Health Index (EHI)[iv] Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve Guanshan National Nature Reserve Jiangxi Yiyang Chinese Merganser Nature Reserve	50% 87% 60%	64% Stable or improved Stable or improved	**Achieved** 73% 94% 69% Individual targets achieved for the three reserves.	Verified by viewing report on EHI analysis, with an annex for each target nature reserve. Confirmed consistent methodology followed.
0.6 No net increase in the area of production activities (illegal plantations and aquaculture operations) within Poyang Lake region in habitat areas for migratory bird species.	3 cases (Baseline determined in 2017)	0% increase	**Achieved** There was a 0 percent increase in the area of production activities (no relevant illegal activities recorded in final reporting period). Baseline of three cases was determined in 2017, using official reports from the "Joint Protection Committee in Poyang Lake Area"; this reported three cases during	Verified by viewing the official stamped reports (in Chinese) from 2017 (used to set baseline) and 2024 (used for final reporting).

Indicators[i]	Baseline	End-of-project target	Level of achievement[ii]	Evaluation Team comments[iii]
			2017 of illegal developments in wetlands that contravened regulations. For final reporting, official report dated 21 October 2024 asserted no illegal production activity reported during the preceding year.	
Component 1: Improved and consolidated wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province				
1.1 Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Area Management Strategy (JPWPAMS) is drafted, which defines approaches, tools and processes for guiding the expansion and consolidated management of wetland protected areas in Jiangxi Province.	No strategy exists	Strategy developed and adopted by end of year three of project	**Achieved** The JPWPAMS was drafted and officially issued by the Jiangxi Forestry Department. In accordance with the indicator, the JPWPAMS defines approaches, tools and processes for guiding the expansion and consolidated management of wetland protected areas in Jiangxi Province.	Verified by viewing JPWPAMS and the authorized issuance (document in Chinese).
1.2 Partnership with relevant sectoral line agencies strengthened to disseminate Wetland Protected Area Management concepts and incorporate them into sectoral development planning and project appraisals.	Very low levels of cooperation among various government agencies on activities that can support wetland conservation	Facilitate the development of organic agriculture pilot projects and their replication (with Dept. of Agriculture); and develop/implement eco-tourism guidelines (with tourism agencies), by end of year three	**Achieved** Facilitated the development of organic agriculture pilot projects and their replication, and developed eco-tourism guidelines. - Report "Jiangxi Organic Agriculture Investigation" developed jointly with Jiangxi Agriculture Department; includes four possible organic agriculture models. Dedicated workshop was held to discuss the priorities and	Verified by viewing two relevant reports; also viewed correspondence dated October 2020 from Jiangxi Culture and Tourism Department regarding the eco-tourism guidelines.

Indicators[i]	**Baseline**	**End-of-project target**	**Level of achievement**[ii]	**Evaluation Team comments**[iii]
			potential farming activities for local communities; also conducted a survey to consult with local fishers affected by Yangtze River fishing ban. - Report "Eco-tourism guidelines" developed by project and provided to Jiangxi Culture and Tourism Department, with the purpose to guide wetland nature reserves in development of eco-tourism; developed in line with international and national standards; in correspondence, the department noted that the report was useful and provided valuable suggestions to further decision-making on resource utilization in multiple ways.	
1.3 Measures for Ecological Compensation Operational Regulations (Draft) in the framework of the existing Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance,	No measures allow for implementation of ecological compensation	Measures formulated and put into operation by end of year three	**Achieved** Eco-compensation guidelines and regulations have been developed, accepted by Jiangxi Forestry Department, and mainstreamed into the Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance.	Verified by viewing relevant documents (in Chinese) and interviews.

Indicators[i]	**Baseline**	**End-of-project target**	**Level of achievement**[ii]	**Evaluation Team comments**[iii]
1.4 Protected Area Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scores improved over baseline values across nine county-level wetland protected areas within the Poyang Lake region.	Nanhu 30 Pingfeng 34 Gutang 36 Liaohuchi 29 Baishazhou38 Huyun 32 Hexi 28 Kangshanhu 34 Qinglanhu 25 *(Project document: "To be determined during project inception")*	Stable or improved *(PIR)* *MT targets (PIR):* Nanhu 32 Pingfeng 39 Gutang 38 Liaohuchi 39 Baishazhou57 Huyun 43 Hexi 34 Kangshanhu 49 Qinglanhu36 *(Project document: "To be determined during project inception")*	**Achieved** *Scores at terminal evaluation:* Nanhu 41 Pingfeng 46 Gutang 39 Liaohuachi 54 Baishazhou 63 Huyun 51 Hexi 37 Kangshan Lake 61 Qinglan Lake 39 The project used the same METT scorecard spreadsheet for baseline, mid-term and terminal evaluation; confirmed with LTO that this was appropriate.	Verified by viewing METT scorecards and discussing with LTO.
1.5 County forestry bureaus implementing activities with approved management plans for three county wetland reserves in Poyang Lake region.	0	3	**Achieved** Three county forestry bureaus implementing activities with approved management plans for wetland reserves. See reporting under indicator 0.4 – the county reserves are: Lushan, Wannian and Yugan.	Verified by management plan for each nature reserve.

Indicators[i]	Baseline	End-of-project target	Level of achievement[ii]	Evaluation Team comments[iii]
Component 2: Wetland Protected Area Management Capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites				
2.1 PA Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scores improved over baseline values for two national and one provincial wetland protected areas within the Poyang Lake region. Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve Nanji National Nature Reserve Duchang Provincial Nature Reserve	69 61 44	83 79 64	**Achieved** *Scores at terminal evaluation:* 85 81 68 The project used the same METT scorecard spreadsheet for baseline, mid-term and terminal evaluation; confirmed with LTO that the scoresheet used was appropriate.	Verified by viewing METT scorecards and discussing with LTO.
2.2 Management plans approved and under implementation for two national and one provincial wetland protected areas.	0	Three plans by end of year three	**Achieved** Three management plans approved and under implementation, for two national (PLNNR and Nanji) and one provincial (Duchang) wetland protected areas.	Verified by viewing management plan and detailed approval documentation for each nature reserve. Also, implementation of plans was confirmed in interviews.
2.3 Cost-effective wetland rehabilitation and restoration techniques tested and best practices documented for replication across the entire Poyang wetland biome[v]	No techniques tested	Wetland vegetation restoration techniques tested in field conditions	**Achieved** Researched and implemented a range of cost-effective wetland rehabilitation and restoration techniques, through partnerships with researchers, other experts and local wetland managers. A wide range of results have been achieved, including practical, cost-effective recommendations for	Verified by viewing interventions at site visits, interviews with experts and project personnel, and viewing technical reports.

<table>
<tr><th>Indicators[i]</th><th>Baseline</th><th>End-of-project target</th><th>Level of achievement[ii]</th><th>Evaluation Team comments[iii]</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>managing Poyang Lake wetlands for biodiversity, especially migratory birds. See Finding 14 for more details.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2.4 Strengthened capacity for protected area management, as measured by an increase in the Total Capacity Development Score in the UNDP-GEF Capacity Scorecard, for all protected areas within the PWEPA system.</td><td>Total score 66 (69%)
<table><tr><th>Capacity Level</th><th>Baseline</th></tr><tr><td>Systemic</td><td>20 (66%)</td></tr><tr><td>Institutional</td><td>31 (69%)</td></tr><tr><td>Individual</td><td>21 (71%)</td></tr></table></td><td>Total score 72 (75%)
<table><tr><th>Capacity Level</th><th>Target</th></tr><tr><td>Systemic</td><td>23 (77%</td></tr><tr><td>Institutional</td><td>32 (71%</td></tr><tr><td>Individual</td><td>17 (81%</td></tr></table></td><td>Achieved
<table><tr><th>Capacity Level</th><th>Target</th></tr><tr><td>Systemic</td><td>25 (83%)</td></tr><tr><td>Institutional</td><td>35 (78%)</td></tr><tr><td>Individual</td><td>17 (81%)</td></tr></table>Results from report “Evaluation Report on the Capacity Building Effectiveness of the Wetland Protection Area System in Jiangxi Province”.</td><td>Verified by viewing report (in Chinese).</td></tr>
<tr><td>2.5 Strengthened staff competence levels of nature reserve staff in PWEPA demonstration sites cover key skills required for the operational management of wetland protected areas (co-management, enforcement, compliance, wetland ecosystem management, species surveys and monitoring, restoration and rehabilitation works).</td><td>Current staff have limited capacities in many aspects of wetlands management</td><td>No. of staff who received training: 150</td><td>Achieved
A total of 920 staff trained in accordance with the indicator (40 percent of the total training attendance).
Target significantly exceeded.</td><td>Verified by viewing training records.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2.6 No. of co-management agreements signed between wetland reserve field stations and</td><td>0</td><td>11</td><td>Achieved</td><td>Verified by viewing 13 co-management agreements (in Chinese). Also, implementation</td></tr>
</table>

Indicators[i]	**Baseline**	**End-of-project target**	**Level of achievement**[ii]	**Evaluation Team comments**[iii]
village committees (e.g. agreements that the field stations will take action against villagers committing illegal hunting/fishing activities if they are so notified by one of the village committees, and agreements on communication and information sharing).			Thirteen co-management agreements signed between wetland reserve field stations and village committees. Exceeded target.	of several co-management agreements discussed during interviews.
2.7 Reduced number of illegal resource use incidents (hunting; illegal polders; fishing out of season; etc.) in three targeted protected areas attributed to protection effort, strengthened regulations, establishment of new field stations, and training of protected area staff and local residents.	PLNNR: 3 Duchang: 7 Nanji: 0 *(Baselines set in 2017)*	30% by end of project	**Achieved** No illegal resource use incidents in the final reporting period. Represents more than the target 30 percent reduction from the baselines. Baselines were determined in 2017, using official reports from enforcement departments (police and legal); these reported cases of relevant illegal activities. For final reporting, these departments were asked for comparable reporting and they reported that no incidents occurred in the final reporting period (no formal reporting available).	Verified by viewing formal enforcement records from 2017 (for baseline); no direct reporting provided on the end-of-project number of incidents. Also heard several anecdotal reports during field interviews that there were few or no illegal resource use incidents nowadays.
2.8 Species conservation plans, including strengthened monitoring, patrolling and training in species-level management, increases the number of globally	0 species conservation plans	6 species conservation plans developed and implemented	**Achieved** Six species conservation plans developed. Separate plans developed for Finless Porpoise and	Verified by viewing plans (in Chinese).

Indicators[i]	Baseline	End-of-project target	Level of achievement[ii]	Evaluation Team comments[iii]
significant and threatened/endangered species under targeted protection in the Poyang Lake region, for the following species: Siberian Crane (*Grus leucogeranus*) Oriental Stork (*Ciconia boyciana*) Swan Goose (*A. cygnoides*) Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) Chinese Water Deer (*Hydropotes inermis)* Finless Porpoise (*Neophocaena phocaenoides*)			Chinese Water Deer, and one plan developed for four migratory birds. These include conservation targets, actions and monitoring.	
Component 3: Institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province				
3.1 No. of staff from all county forestry bureaus in Poyang Lake region and three counties outside of Poyang Lake Region trained in migratory bird monitoring and protection, including use of equipment; knowledge of relevant laws and regulations; identification of migratory birds; dissemination of information on laws, regulations, wetland conservation to the public; and cooperative management of county wetland reserves with PLNNR field stations.	0	30	**Achieved** A total of 746 staff (196 female) trained in accordance with the indicator. This included staff in and outside the Poyang Lake region. Target significantly exceeded.	Verified with data file showing training details of training topic, number of attendees (disaggregated by gender), and whether the participants were in or outside of the Poyang Lake region.

<table>
<tr><th>Indicators[i]</th><th>Baseline</th><th>End-of-project target</th><th>Level of achievement[ii]</th><th>Evaluation Team comments[iii]</th></tr>
<tr><td>3.2 Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System is established and operational for data sharing between protected area sites, and providing information to sectoral agencies for improved wetland and protected area management.</td><td>No system in place</td><td>Information system is operational by end of year three</td><td>Achieved
Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System is established and operational in accordance with the indicator.</td><td>Verified through a live demonstration of the information system.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3.3 Number of institutions (protected area units; provincial and county agencies) using the wetlands database platform to input and update wetland data in Jiangxi provincial wetland protected area</td><td>0</td><td>At least 5 by end of year three</td><td>Achieved
Five institutions are using the information system in accordance with the indicator (PLNNR, Duchang, Wannian, Lushan and Yugan nature reserves).</td><td>Verified with five screenshots of the system in active use, each showing the name of a different institution embedded in the interface.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3.4 Number of people per year who visit the wetlands database platform website to find data about wetlands in Jiangxi Province.</td><td>0</td><td>10 000</td><td>Achieved
45 157 over three years, therefore the annual amount is 15 052.</td><td>Verified by viewing visitation data and discussions with PMO.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3.5 # of visitors per year to Poyang Lake Nature Reserve Visitor Centre (if established in Nanchang).</td><td>0</td><td>30 000</td><td>Achieved
<table><tr><th>Year</th><th># visitors</th></tr><tr><td>2019</td><td>3 300</td></tr><tr><td>2020</td><td>10 660</td></tr><tr><td>2021</td><td>14 553</td></tr><tr><td>2022</td><td>5 640</td></tr><tr><td>2023</td><td>29 325</td></tr><tr><td>2024</td><td>30 073</td></tr></table></td><td>Verified by viewing annual visitor records for visitor centres from 2019 to 2024. In addition to the PLNNR Visitor Centre at Nanchang, this includes records from centres at the nature reserves of Wucheng , Duchang, Dahuchi, Wannian, and Shahu, which the project provided support to in planning and upgrading visitor displays.</td></tr>
</table>

Indicators[i]	Baseline	End-of-project target	Level of achievement[ii]	Evaluation Team comments[iii]
3.6 Improved understanding on the values of wetlands and the wetland protected area system, indicated by knowledge, attitudes and practices surveys All respondents in Jiangxi Province: Knowledge Attitudes Practices **Overall average** Key groups (decision-makers and rural residents; evenly weighted) in Jiangxi Province with a significant impact on wetland conservation: Knowledge Attitudes Practices **Overall Average**	50% 73% 48% **54%** 52% 73% 54% **56%**	65% 85% 62% **70%** 68% 90% 70% **73%**	**Achieved** Report received and all KAP targets were met. 74% 87% 63% **74%** 74% 90% 72% **78%**	Verified by review of Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) Final Survey Report (March 2024).

Notes: [i] The numbering of the indicators has been adopted for convenience in this report; they are not numbered in the results framework.
[ii] Confirmed and collected from various sources, especially 2024 Self-Assessment Report, 2023 and 2024 PIRs, data and documents provided by the PMO, discussions with the PMO, and interviews with stakeholders.
[3] Includes information on the evidence used to verify reported achievements.
[iv] Biodiversity health is reflected in the ability of a site to maintain its biodiversity values. Many wetland sites are very dynamic, and it is important to measure this ability as it will become increasingly important as climate and water flow patterns change. During the project preparation phase, an EHI was established to measure habitat suitability at each site for important biodiversity and to monitor its status as a means of measuring biodiversity health and the potential to adapt to climate-induced change. However, the targets indicated for the Guanshan and Jiangxi Yiyang reserves are only estimates of what is hoped will change by the end of the project, since these two sites are control sites and outside of the direct influence of the GEF project.
[v] Wetland restoration strategies and techniques will be tested in wetland field settings. If any of them prove to be effective and cost efficient, then those practices will be documented and promoted for replication throughout the province (replication would only happen after the GEF project).

Appendix 6. Evaluation matrix

Evaluation questions	Subquestions/indicators	Comments	Methods/informants
1. Relevance			
1.1 To what extent are the three project components and objectives aligned with current country environmental and development priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework, the mandates of executing partners, and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?	Identify current country environmental and development priorities – discuss during interviews. Indicator: Alignment (qualitative)	Assess against strategies, priorities, frameworks and needs at design phase and through to the end of implementation, wherever possible.	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs/FGDs Information sources: - Strategies, priorities and frameworks - Informants, especially executing agencies, FAO, beneficiaries at pilot sites
	Compare with GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies and the FAO Country Programming Framework – discuss during interviews. Indicator: Alignment (qualitative)		
	Identify the mandates of executing agencies – discuss during interviews. Indicator: Alignment (qualitative)		
	Identify the needs and priorities of target beneficiaries – discuss during interviews; ask about their involvement in project design. Indicator: Alignment (qualitative)		
2. Coherence			
2.1 *External coherence*. Is the intervention harmonized with the actions implemented by other actors in the same context (e.g. development agencies, other GEF projects)? Does the	Assess project document to determine whether intervention was well harmonized during design. Discuss during interviews	Assess at the design stage and during implementation.	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs/FGDs - Site visits Information sources: - Project document, other project preparation documents, reporting - All stakeholders, including partners
	Identify areas where the intervention has added value. Identify areas where duplication was avoided or where duplication appears to have occurred – discuss during interviews.		

Evaluation questions	**Subquestions/indicators**	**Comments**	**Methods/informants**
intervention add value compared to others and was duplication of effort avoided?	Indicators: assessment against these subquestions (qualitative).		
2.2 *Internal coherence*. To what extent did the project design provide a practical approach for addressing the targeted environmental concern (i.e. conservation of wetland biodiversity) in terms of coherence of the vertical and horizontal logic in the results framework? To what extent do the project components, activities and M&E system align with the project objectives?	Analyse the design (including using the reconstructed theory of change) - Was it practical and feasible? - Did it address the targeted environmental concern? - Analyse the vertical logic in the results framework - – do the project components, activities, and M&E system align with the project objectives? - Analyse the horizontal logic Indicators: assessment against these subquestions (qualitative).	The reconstructed theory of change in this inception report will be an important tool.	Methods: - Desk review, especially of design - KIIs/FGDs - Site visits (was the project practical?) Information sources: - Project document + results framework, other project preparation documents, M&E - All stakeholders

Evaluation questions	**Subquestions/indicators**	**Comments**	**Methods/informants**
3. Effectiveness			
3.1 To what extent did the project contribute to: • Improving and consolidating the wetland protected area system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province? • Strengthening wetland protected area management capacity? • Strengthening institutional and stakeholder capacities to manage the consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province?	Assess achievement of the three components, outcomes and outputs against the revised results framework. Indicators: Achievement of indicators and targets (quantitative) and narrative descriptions of contributions (qualitative).	Baselines, targets, milestones and means of verification in revised results framework in the project document.	Methods: - Desk review, including of project M&E - KIIs/FGDs - Site visits Information sources: - Annual and six-monthly reporting, other reporting, project deliverables and other documentation - All stakeholders
4. Efficiency			
4.1 To what extent has the FAO/operational partner partnership facilitated or hampered project execution, timely resolution of issues during project implementation and contribution to project results and objectives?			Methods: - Desk review, especially Execution Agreement - KIIs Information sources: - Execution agreement and associated documentation, project steering committee (PSC) minutes, other reporting - FAO and PLNNR informants
	Clarify the partnership arrangements and modality. Has this partnership been smooth and facilitative or have there been challenges?	The project is indirect execution through an execution agreement between FAO and PLNNR – it is not OPIM (the project started before the OPIM modality became operational).	
	What are the main issues that have required addressing? How have these changed during execution? How have FAO and PLNNR collaborated		

Evaluation questions	Subquestions/indicators	Comments	Methods/informants
	to i. achieve timely resolution of issues and ii. contribute to project results and objectives? Has the OP efficiently met the requirements of the execution agreement or have there been challenges? Indicators: assessment against these subquestions (qualitative).		
5. Implementation			
5.1 How is FAO monitoring progress and technical quality of the work of the operational partner? Is the Budget Holder/project team appropriately equipped to monitor and oversee the operational partner? Does it get support if needed, does it lead to the implementation of corrective actions and improvement of identified weaknesses?	Document FAO's system for monitoring progress and technical quality of the work of the OP Identify resources (including human resources) allocated to this		Methods: - Desk review - KIIs Information sources: - Execution agreement and associated documentation, PSC minutes, other reporting - FAO Budget Holder, FAO backstopping personnel, FAO country office personnel, PLNNR informants
	Has the operational partner received appropriate support from FAO and does it lead to corrective actions or improvement of weaknesses – ask during interviews. Are the resources allocated appropriate/sufficient? Indicators: assessment against these subquestions (qualitative).		
6. Execution			
6.1 To what extent have the executing agencies, including the selected	Identify the operational partner's roles, responsibilities and commitments in project document and execution agreement.	The project document and execution agreement set out	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs

Evaluation questions	**Subquestions/indicators**	**Comments**	**Methods/informants**
operational partner, effectively fulfilled their roles and responsibilities in the management and administration of the project?	Review operational partner's performance against identified roles, responsibilities and commitments Discuss executing agency's role/performance with FAO and other stakeholders where appropriate. Indicators: assessment against roles, responsibilities and commitments (qualitative).	roles and responsibilities of the operational partner and FAO.	Information sources: - Execution agreement and associated documentation, PIRs and PPRs, other reporting - FAO country office personnel, FAO backstopping personnel, PLNNR informants, other stakeholders where appropriate
7. Additionality			
7.1 What are the specific areas where GEF support has contributed to additional or unintended results, and what were these additional or unintended results (positive or negative)?	Identify additional or unintended results (positive or negative). Were these a result (fully or partially) of the GEF support? Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (qualitative).		Methods: - Desk review - KIIs, FGDs - Site visits Information sources: - Project reporting - All informants
8. Sustainability			
8.1 What is the degree of ownership of the project's achievements by the main actors at the institutional, regional and local level and to what extent do they have the resources and interests to capitalize on the achievements beyond the duration of the project?	Identify ownership by the main actors at the institutional, regional and local level. Discuss interest in continuing and capitalizing on achievements during interviews.	Discuss sustainability in <u>all</u> KIIs/FGDs	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs, FGDs - Site visits Information sources: - All project reporting and documentation, especially information on sustainability planning - Knowledge products and dissemination, capacity building - Implementing partners, beneficiaries
	What resources will they bring to sustaining and capitalizing on results? Assess adequacy of resources. Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (qualitative).		
	Was sustainability planned for from early in project?	Discuss sustainability in <u>all</u> KIIs/FGDs	

Evaluation questions	Subquestions/indicators	Comments	Methods/informants
8.2 To what extent has the project identified, anticipated and planned for key risks which may affect the sustainability of the project benefits (financial, institutional, environmental, sociopolitical and others)?	Was a sustainability/exit strategy developed?		
	Identify key positive and negative factors that contribute to the likelihood (in categories financial, institutional, environmental, sociopolitical and others)? Did the project identify, anticipate and plan for these?		
	Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (semi-quantitative and qualitative).		
9. M&E			
9.1 (M&E design) To what extent did the M&E plan sufficiently identify resources and budget for M&E activities in line with the project theory of change and monitoring and evaluation requirements?	Assess completeness of M&E plan against requirements. Is the M&E plan in line with the theory of change? Break down M&E budget and compare with similar GEF projects. Indicators: M&E budget as % of budget – compare with other projects (quantitative and qualitative).		Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs Information sources: - All documents, especially project document (including M&E plan and budget), PIRs and other reporting, data, etc. - PMO and other project personnel, FAO Country Office, FAO LTO and GEF Technical Officer
9.2 (M&E implementation) Was information gathered systematically, in a timely manner, and according to a robust methodology?	Assess implementation against each component of the M&E plan. Is the project clear about each indicator and how it is being measured/reported against? Assess adaptive management and the use of M&E (especially check PIRs and PPRs and raise during interviews).		
9.3 (M&E implementation) To what extent was the collected information			

Evaluation questions	Subquestions/indicators	Comments	Methods/informants
used to inform decision-making, foster learning and support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?	Assess how M&E is being used during implementation to inform decisions, foster learning and support sustainability and scaling up. Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (qualitative).		
10. Co-financing			
10.1 To what extent did the planned co-financing materialize, and how did the shortfall in co-financing, or the realization of greater than expected co-financing, affect project results?	Is reporting of co-financing substantiated? Are records kept of co-financing and is it reported in PIRs/other reporting? Analyse committed vs materialized co-financing from different co-financers. Assess contribution of co-financing to results. Indicators: materialized contribution (quantitative) and assessment against subquestions (qualitative).		Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs Information sources: - Project document and associated documentation, co-financing reporting (especially PIRs), and other relevant reporting on contributions - PMO, FAO Country Office, FAO GTO, co-financers
10. Application of GEF policies and guidelines			
11.1 To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?	Review project document and associated documents from project preparation. Assess whether agreed measures have been taken and if not, investigate why not. Have there been environmental and social issues that were not fully considered during implementation? Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (qualitative).	Consider Environmental and Social Standards requirements at the time of project preparation/implementation of relevant approved measures and any changes in approach during implementation.	Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs - Field visits Information sources: - Project document and associated documents from project preparation, relevant reporting on environmental and social concerns (especially PIRs and PPRs) - PMO, FAO Country Office, FAO LTO, beneficiaries

Evaluation questions	**Subquestions/indicators**	**Comments**	**Methods/informants**
11.2 Were gender equality and empowerment and other equity and human rights issues mainstreamed in the project/programme, both in design and implementation?	Assess how gender equality and empowerment and other equity and human rights issues were mainstreamed into the project. The following questions will be considered regarding gender: - Were relevant gender issues addressed in the project document? - Was a gender analysis undertaken and were gender-specific activities, targets and monitoring established? - Were sex-disaggregated data collected relating to project activities and outcomes? - Was there an appropriate gender balance in participation in project activities? - Were gender specialists involved in project inception and implementation stages? - Did the project have a gender focal point? Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (qualitative).	Consider mainstreaming of the issues at the time of project preparation and during implementation; identify any changes in approach during implementation.	Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs, FGDs - Field visits Information sources: - Project document and associated documents from project preparation, relevant reporting on gender and other equity and human rights issues (especially PIRs and PPRs) - PMO, FAO Country Office, FAO LTO, beneficiaries
11.3 To what extent have local communities and/or Indigenous communities been duly informed, consulted and involved in the decision-making process prior to project implementation?	Identify local communities/ethnic minorities present. Analyse the extent to which they were informed, consulted and involved. Indicators: documentation of findings against these subquestions (qualitative).		Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs, FGDs - Field visits Information sources: - Project document and associated documents from project preparation, relevant reporting (especially PIRs and PPRs) - PMO, FAO Country Office, FAO LTO, beneficiaries

Appendix 7. Glossary

[Source: GEF. 2019. *The GEF evaluation policy (Prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF)*. GEF/ME/C.56/02/Rev.01. Washington, DC. https://www.thegef.org/council-meeting-documents/gef-evaluation-policy]

Agency fee: the financing provided to a GEF partner agency in connection with a GEF project or programme.

Chief Executive Officer approval: the approval of a fully developed medium-sized project or enabling activity by the GEF Chief Executive Officer.

Chief Executive Officer endorsement: the endorsement of a fully developed full-sized project by the GEF Chief Executive Officer.

Child project: a project that forms part of a programme, as set out in a programme framework document.

Co-financing: financing additional to the GEF project financing, and that supports implementation of a GEF-financed project or programme and the achievement of its objectives.

Evaluation: the systematic and impartial assessment of planned, ongoing or completed activities, projects and programmes in specific focal areas or sectors, policies, strategies and their implementation, or other topics relevant to the GEF partnership and organization.

Full-sized project: a project with the GEF project financing exceeding USD 2 million.

GEF additionality: the additional effects (both environmental and otherwise) that can be directly associated with a GEF-supported project or programme.

GEF agency: an agency that is eligible to request and receive the GEF resources directly for the design, implementation and supervision of the GEF projects and programmes.

GEF-financed activity (or intervention): any programmatic approach, full-sized project, medium-sized project or enabling activity financed from any GEF-managed trust fund, as well as regional and national outreach activities.

GEF Operational Focal Point: nominated by the recipient country, the GEF Operational Focal Point: ensures that the GEF proposals and activities in the country are consistent with country priorities and the country commitments under global environmental conventions; identifies project ideas to meet country priorities; endorses project proposals; facilitates broad-based in-country consultations on the GEF operational matters; and provides feedback on the GEF activities, including the implementation of projects (GEF, 1996).

Global Environmental Benefits: these relate to international conventions and commitments that the GEF is mandated to serve. The GEF projects must demonstrate that the project activities are delivering global environmental benefits.

Goal: a higher-order objective to which a GEF-financed project or programme is intended to contribute.

Knowledge management: the process by which organizations within the GEF partnership generate value and improve performance from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets.

Impact: the positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a project or programme, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

Indicator: a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, reflect the changes connected to a project or programme, or help assess the performance of an organization.

Lead agency: the agency that coordinates all activities under a programme.

Medium-sized project: a project with the GEF project financing of up to USD 2 million.

Mid-term review: an assessment of a project's or programme's performance and results carried out for adaptive management purposes at the midpoint of a project's or programme's intended duration.

Monitoring: a continuous or periodic function carried out by project or programme management that uses a standardized and systematic process of collecting and analysing data on specific indicators to provide decision-makers and the management of a GEF-financed activity with information on progress in the achievement of objectives and in the use of allocated funds.

Outcome: an intended or achieved short- or medium-term effect of a project's or programme's outputs.

Output: a product or service that results from the completion of activities implemented within a project or programme.

Portfolio: a subset of projects focusing on a specific theme, the GEF focal area, geographic region, country or the GEF agency.

Programme: a coherent set of interventions designed to attain specific global, regional, country or sector objectives, consisting of a variable number of child projects.

Programme's added value: the additional results brought in by the GEF funding delivered as a programme compared with either a pre-existing or a hypothetical set of standalone full- and/or medium-sized projects or other comparable alternatives.

Programme framework document: the document that sets forth the concept of a programme that is proposed for the GEF financing.

Result: includes intervention outputs, outcomes and progress towards longer-term impact, including global environmental benefits, and should be discernible/measurable.

Stakeholder: an individual or group that has an interest in the outcome of a GEF project or programme or is likely to be affected by it, such as local communities, Indigenous Peoples, civil society organizations and private sector entities. Stakeholders may include national project or programme executing agencies, or groups contracted to conduct activities at various stages of the project or programme.

Stakeholder engagement: a process that begins with stakeholder identification and analysis, and includes planning, the disclosure of information, consultation and participation, M&E and learning throughout the project cycle, addressing grievances, and ongoing reporting to stakeholders.

Terminal evaluation: evaluation of a project's or programme's design, performance and results carried out at the end of implementation.

Appendix 9. Risk-based sustainability analysis from the project's self-assessment report

Extract from: Self-assessment of the project "Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province" (Project Code: GCP/CPR/052/GFF), December 2024, prepared by the PMO, PLNNR under the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department, pp. 145–150.

3.4 Sustainability of project outcomes

Self-evaluation: the sustainability of project outcomes is very likely

3.4.1 Overall probability of sustainability

This project yielded many fruits, as already shown in the progress against outputs. Among them: (1) the establishment of the cross-sector comprehensive coordination system plays an important role in strengthening the consolidated wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province – the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee will also continue their coordination efforts in wetland and migratory bird conservation in the Poyang Lake region; (2) the successful techniques and good practices of wetland restoration will continue to be carried out by relevant scientific research institutions, reserves and county forestry departments in Poyang Lake; (3) the research results of management strategy, standards and guidelines, and gap analysis will continue to be utilized in the field of wetland protection in Jiangxi Province; (4) policy assessment, METT, capacity building scorecard, training effectiveness scorecard, EHI, KAP and other toolkits can be continuously applied; (5) the community co-management structures will keep working; and (6) knowledge management and communication experience will continue through the implementation of project communication and the communications strategy.

The above achievements can be sustained with the current fiscal and public service expenditures without requiring additional financial support. They have a clear characteristic of low-cost operation and can continue to yield benefits. Overall, the sustainability is "very likely."

3.4.2 Sustainability in relation to financial risks

When this project exits, it does not require much governmental budget to maintain the achievements. The project has promoted many policies on wetland protection and ecological compensation in Jiangxi Province. The continued operation of these policies can be maintained by the relevant departments within their existing responsibilities. Other results and experiences can continue to work without excessive financial input. The experience of project financing practice, especially the good practices of the wetland bank mechanism, is being adopted and used by more counties in Jiangxi Province.

The project's experience in financial risk control and management can be continuously used for reference in the wetland protection system.

(1) Develop a risk management and control plan: carry out a risk assessment on a regular basis and identify possible financial risks during project implementation. Develop specific mitigation measures and corrective action plans for the identified risks. Specify the duration and responsible person of each task to ensure effective implementation of risk control measures.

In response to the identified financial sustainability risks, the PMO coordinated with the Wetland Division of the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department to actively implement the Programme on Comprehensively Promoting Financial and Taxation Support Policies for the Yangtze River Economic Belt issued by the State Council, and to promote ecological protection financial inputs and ecological compensation mechanisms in order to provide relatively adequate funding for the livelihoods of the Poyang Lake area, as well as the communities around the Jiangxi wetland protection system.

(2) Budget management: develop detailed annual workplans and procurement plans to ensure that resources are properly allocated across project activities. Through budget management, expenditures for each output are planned, timings are set for completion and costs are controlled. Budget implementation is monitored on a regular basis, and budgets are adjusted in a timely manner to respond to actual or anticipated deviations.

(3) Compliance check: implement a strict internal approval system to ensure all financial activities comply with laws, regulations and internal policies. Conduct regular compliance checks and audits to identify and correct non-compliance in a timely manner. Strengthen compliance training for the project team and improve compliance awareness among team members.

(4) Information sharing and communication: establish an effective information-sharing mechanism, such as using a public mailbox, holding meetings regularly, strengthening internal communication, etc. Ensure that the project team members have timely access to information on financial status and potential risks. Encourage communication and collaboration among team members to address financial risks.

(5) Continuous improvement: based on project experiences and feedback, regularly review and evaluate internal control systems and financial risk management processes. Identify opportunities for improvement and take steps to optimize processes, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of financial risk management. Establish a continuous improvement mechanism to encourage team members to propose suggestions for improvement, constantly striving for excellence.

3.4.3 Sustainability in relation to socioeconomic risks

The project has implemented community co-management at the site level, establishing a community co-management framework. Thirteen community co-management agreements have been signed, adhering to the principle of balancing wetland protection obligations with resource utilization rights. This framework has fostered a community meeting model that focuses on participation.

Community residents, based on their own willingness, are free to express their opinions on community co-management, alternative livelihoods and community economic development. Community patrols are organized through agreements or contracts with community patrol members, specifying their duties and corresponding remuneration. The PMO and demonstration protected areas also conduct inspections, reviewing the fulfilment of relevant patrol agreements or contracts.

Upholding the spirit of contracts is crucial to reducing community economic risks. The community co-management and alternative livelihoods work carried out by the project has a positive impact on community economics. It helps to reduce economic risks and has promising potential for further incubation, replication and promotion with a high level of sustainability.

3.4.4 Sustainability in relation to institutional and governance risks

An important goal of the project is to enhance the sustainable institutional capacity for wetland protection in Jiangxi Province. Through demonstration and training activities in the Poyang Lake area, covering key aspects such as policies and regulations, planning and management, wildlife and biodiversity conservation, wetland restoration, modern management frameworks and plans, financing and business plans, migratory bird and wetland biodiversity monitoring, and community co-management, the project leverages the comprehensive coordination system for wetland protection in Jiangxi Province. Training has been conducted for personnel from various provincial departments, including forestry, development and reform, agriculture and rural affairs, natural resources, water resources, ecological environment, culture and tourism, market supervision, public security, the prosecutor's office, and publicity to improve the quality and capacity of management institutions and related agencies. This has significantly reduced institutional and governance risks while continually strengthening institutional sustainability.

At the community level, the co-management committees work in tandem with the village committees, playing a crucial role in wetland protection and the sustainable use of wetland resources. Their concepts and participatory working methods have had a far-reaching impact on rural social governance. These approaches are widely welcomed by residents in the demonstration villages and have also encouraged village committees to adopt the project's experience to enhance the level of rural governance.

The application of key management tools such as METT, institutional capacity scorecards, EHI, KAP, policy scorecards, financial sustainability scorecards, and training effectiveness scorecards, along with the management experiences from demonstration and priority replication areas, has set a benchmark for wetland protection in Jiangxi Province. The project's impact on other wetland protected areas is significant. No risks have been identified or encountered in terms of institutional capacity and governance. The sustainability of the institutions is now securely assured.

3.4.5 Sustainability in relation to environmental risks

The main environmental risks in the wetland system of Jiangxi Province are the extreme climatic impacts of high temperatures and droughts from 2022 to 2023, which led to the record low water levels in Poyang Lake, as well as the early onset of the dry season. The project worked closely with the Wetland Division of the Provincial Forestry Department and 15 counties in the lake area. In response to environmental risks, a series of activities were carried out, including maintenance of the sublake, water replenishment, submerged vegetation planting, grass mowing and the establishment of "migratory bird cafeterias." These efforts effectively mitigated the impacts of climate change and enhanced the "adaptive" management capabilities of wetland conservation and management agencies in addressing climate change.

Based on the lessons learned, the project supported the development of the Emergency Plan for Extreme Climate Events Affecting Wintering Migratory Birds in Poyang Lake, which was issued by the Wetland Division of the Jiangxi Provincial Forestry Department and played an important role in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. Through the project's work over the past two years, the capacity to respond to environmental risks was improved across the Poyang Lake wetland conservation areas and the entire wetland protection system of Jiangxi Province. The outcomes of activities such as sand mining area planning and sand extraction volume limits, as well as rural community wastewater treatment demonstrations, have also helped reduce environmental risks. The project has effectively addressed issues related to environmental risks in wetland protected areas, ensuring the sustainability of the environment.

3.4.6 Catalysis and replication

The content related to project catalysis and replication is covered in Section 2.1 of this report. Almost all project outcomes can be catalysed and replicated. The key project outcomes with catalytic and replicable benefits include:

The Establishment and Operation of a Cross-departmental Comprehensive Coordination System to comprehensively enhance the "mainstreaming level" of wetland conservation. The Jiangxi Provincial Wetland Comprehensive Coordination Group, facilitated by this project, has completed the tasks outlined in the project design. However, in practice, the PMO, in collaboration with the Wetlands Department of the Provincial Forestry Department, conducted capacity building for external agencies in the Poyang Lake area across ten cities in Jiangxi Province. The primary instructors were the head of the Wetlands Department and PMO experts. These training sessions were both professional technical and management trainings on wetland conservation, as well as workshops on how to promote the construction of Jiangxi’s wetland protection system.

Starting in 2022, training was held in the cities of Jiujiang, Shangrao and Nanchang, with only wetland conservation and forestry administration personnel attending. By 2023, training was expanded to include participants from relevant agencies such as agriculture and rural affairs, and water resources, in cities like Yichun, Ji’an and Fuzhou. In 2024, training in Xinyu, Ganzhou, Pingxiang and Yingtan included staff from public security, the prosecutor’s office, the propaganda department and other institutions. The number of participating units and individuals increased, and the curriculum expanded to include topics like wetland law enforcement, wetland park construction, biodiversity conservation, management plans for protected areas and the development strategy for wetland protection in Jiangxi. The training also analysed the progress of wetland conservation work in different regions and set requirements for the construction and operational mechanisms of local comprehensive coordination bodies. The experiences gained offer valuable insights for other provinces and municipalities.

The Significant Effectiveness of Wetland Restoration Models under Climate Change contributed to the development of “new productive forces” in ecological restoration. The project developed four wetland restoration models, all of which are innovative practices guided by transformative theories and have significant reference value for wetland restoration in freshwater lakes in the Yangtze River basin and similar lakes in Southeast Asia.

Sublake Maintenance and Reconstruction: this method preserves the water and thus the wetland, maintaining biodiversity in the sublake and restoring habitats. By using “nature-based solutions” to restore wetland biodiversity, it is a low-cost, fast-acting approach with clear cost advantages and substantial catalytic and replication potential.

Submerged Vegetation Restoration Experiment (pilot testing): based on the success of small-scale trials, a full-scale pilot test was conducted on the large water surface of a sublake. By October 2024, monitoring results showed that the selected submerged plant was growing well, producing from 5 to 10 cm winter buds, and had the potential to reproduce in the large water surface of Poyang Lake. The surrounding water transparency increased, and the total nitrogen and phosphorus content decreased, showing promising results. This success came, despite years of efforts from many domestic research institutions and universities with no significant results. This breakthrough is not only the result of the team’s dedication and hard work but also an outcome of the project’s innovative management model, making it highly catalytic and replicable.

Community Development Focused on Solving Employment for Retired Fishermen addressed livelihoods. The project’s alternative livelihood activities, combined with the 10-year fishing ban policy, were implemented with great effort to address the livelihood issues of retired fishermen in the Poyang Lake area. Alternative livelihood demonstrations such as rice-duck-fish farming, greenhouse grape cultivation and blueberry farming involved marginalized rural groups (for example, those with no or low income) in the activities, allowing them to earn wages and increase their income. Providing relatively decent employment opportunities helped these individuals move away from reliance on aid or subsidies, escape a state of dependence, form independent personalities and awareness, and live with dignity. This approach has universal catalytic and replicable significance.

Promotion of the Development and Implementation of Management Plans enhanced the capacity of wetland conservation institutions. The project supported three demonstration protected areas and three priority replication counties in the Poyang Lake region in developing and implementing participatory management plans, yielding positive results. The relevant experiences are being replicated in other wetland protected areas across Jiangxi Province and will significantly promote the development of the wetland protection system.

These project outcomes can also be catalysed and replicated in the FAO-GEF projects in other provinces.

Appendix 10. Documents provided by the PMO

1. JPWPAMS
2. Jiangxi Province wetland ecotourism guidelines
3. Survey report of organic agriculture in Jiangxi Province
4. Verification for use of the eco-tourism guidelines issued by the Jiangxi Provincial Culture and Tourism Department
5. Study report on the eco-compensation mechanism
6. Management Measures for the Ecological Compensation Funds for Nationally Important Wetlands in the Poyang Lake Region
7. Suggestions for Improving Wetland Ecological Compensation Mechanisms in Jiangxi Province
8. Conservation plan for the Yangtze finless porpoise
9. Implementation report of the Yangtze finless porpoise conservation plan
10. Conservation plan for the Chinese water deer
11. Implementation report of the Chinese water deer conservation plan
12. Conservation plan for four key species of migratory birds
13. Work reports from the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve
14. Seven field station monitoring reports (Duchang, Hukou, Jinxian, Jiujiang, Poyang, Wannian and Yugan)
15. Geographic maps of the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve, seven field stations of the PLNNR and three wetland protected areas outside of Poyang Lake
16. County Forestry Bureau reports from the Poyang Lake region: Yugan, Wannian and Lushan County Forestry Bureaus
17. EHI M&E report
18. Report of the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee (for illustration of no net increase of illegal plantations and aquaculture operations)
19. Case records of illegal plantations in 2017
20. Official letter from the Jiangxi Provincial Forestry Department for publishing the Jiangxi Province Wetland Management Strategy
21. METT for nine county-level wetland protected areas within the Poyang Lake region (filled out at the start, the middle and the end of the project)
22. Management plans for three pilot county reserves: Yugan, Wannian and Lushan County Nature Reserves
23. Approval of county-level management plans by local forestry bureaus
24. METT scorecards for three demonstration nature reserves, namely the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve (filled out at the start, the middle and the end of the project)

25. Official management plans for the PLNNR, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve
26. Approval of management plans by responsible forestry department and bureaus
27. Technical report on wetland habitat and vegetation restoration
28. Final technical report on the aquatic plant restoration experiment in Changhuchi
29. Poyang Lake wetland observation and experiment technical specification V5.1
30. Policy recommendations for habitat modification and wetland restoration
31. Capacity scorecard filled out at project start and project closure
32. Performance and qualification certificates and training list
33. Thirteen signed co-management agreements with local villages
34. Protected area records of illegal resource use incidents
35. Annual monitoring reports in the Poyang Lake region (2017–2023)
36. Performance and qualification certificates and training list for county forestry bureaus in Jiangxi Province
37. Screenshot of the number of visitors to the information system
38. Visitor centre records from 2019 to 2024
39. KAP survey report (end of project)
40. Gender mainstreaming strategy
41. Meeting minutes for consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs on alternative livelihoods
42. Training records for different audiences
43. Diagrams of protected areas for different monitoring stations
44. Project steering committee meeting minutes from 2018 to 2024
45. Record of visitor statistics for the information management system
46. Evaluation report on the Capacity Building Effectiveness of the Wetland Protection Area System in Jiangxi Province
47. Subcontracts with different stakeholders
48. Exit strategy and sustainability plan
49. Communications and knowledge sharing strategy
50. Direct beneficiaries of the FAO-GEF project in Jiangxi Province with data provided by the PMO
51. *Self-assessment of the project "Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province" (Project Code: GCP/CPR/052/GFF)*. December 2024.
52. Evaluation Report on the Capacity Building Effectiveness of the Wetland Protection Area System in Jiangxi Province

Annexes

Annex 1. Terms of reference for the evaluation

http://www.fao.org/3/cd5753en/GCP_CPR_052_GFF_Annex_1.pdf

Office of Evaluation
evaluation@fao.org
www.fao.org/evaluation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

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